

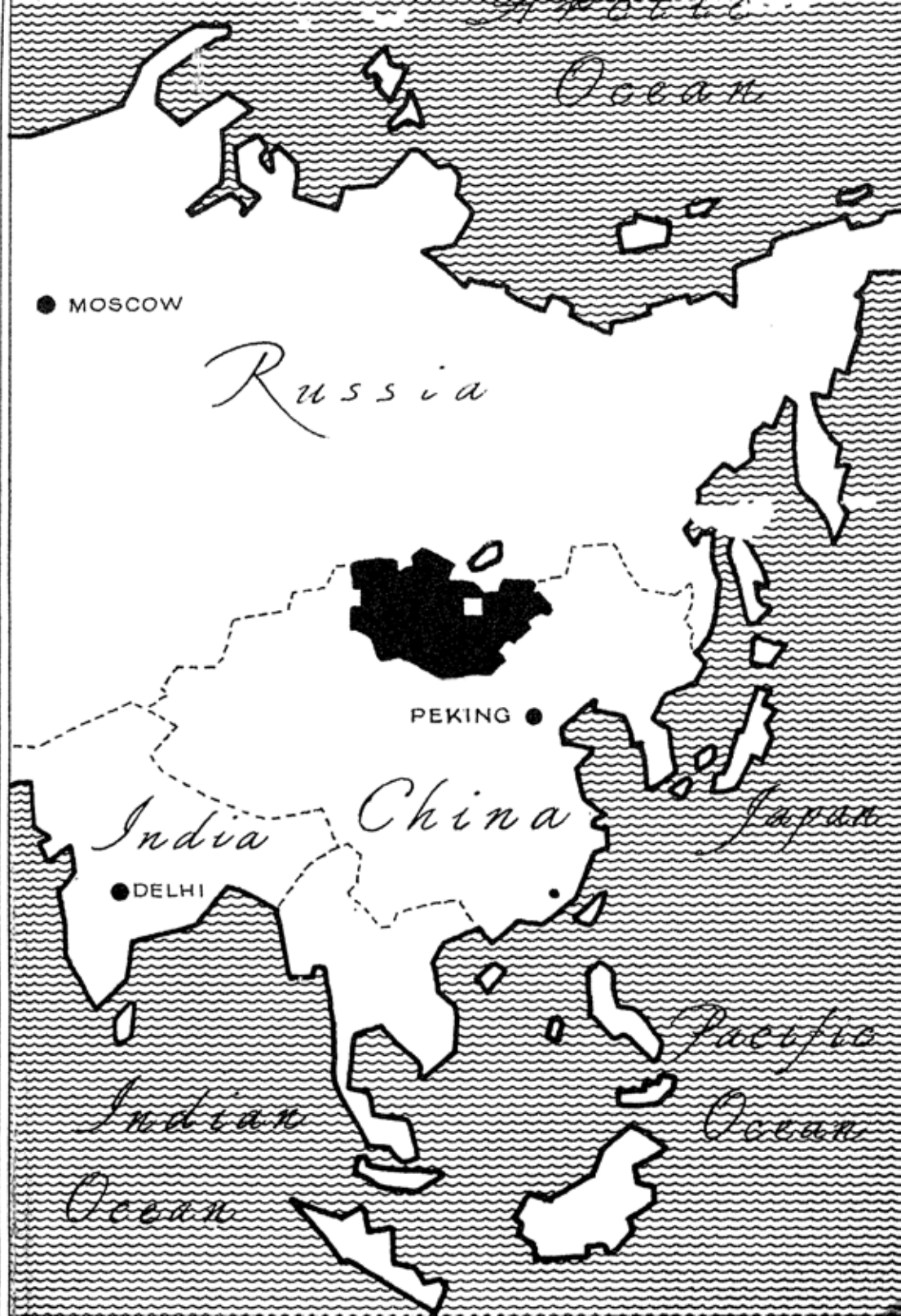
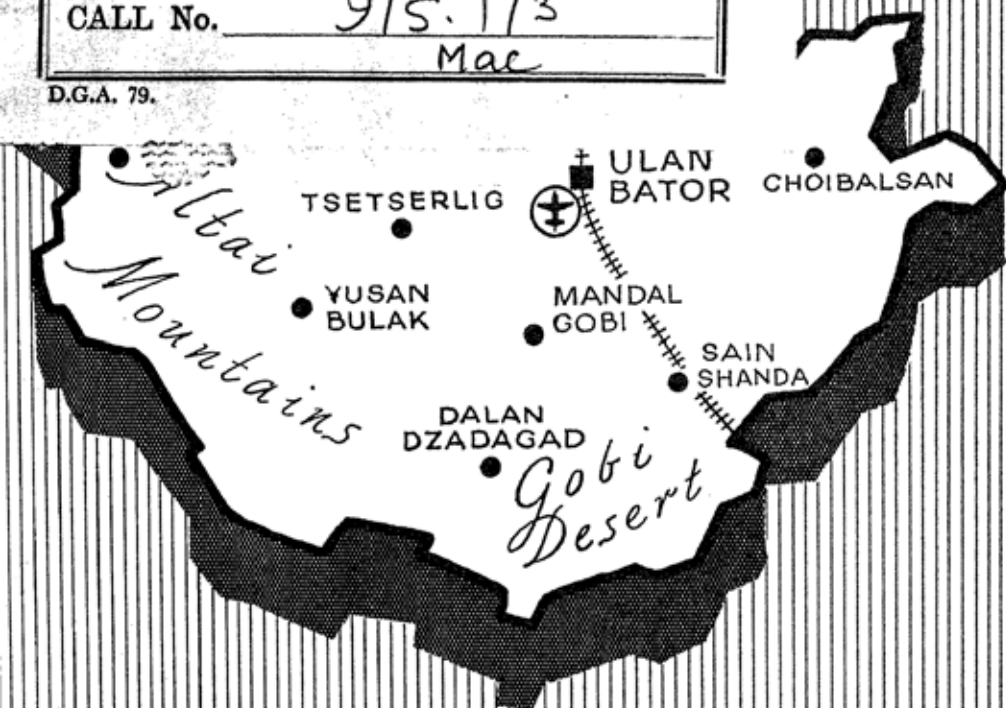
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# THE LAND OF GENGHIS KHAN



RENÉ MACCOLL

*THE LAND OF*  
*GENGHIS KHAN*

A JOURNEY IN OUTER MONGOLIA

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OLDBOURNE  
LONDON

OLDBOURNE BOOK CO. LTD.

121 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

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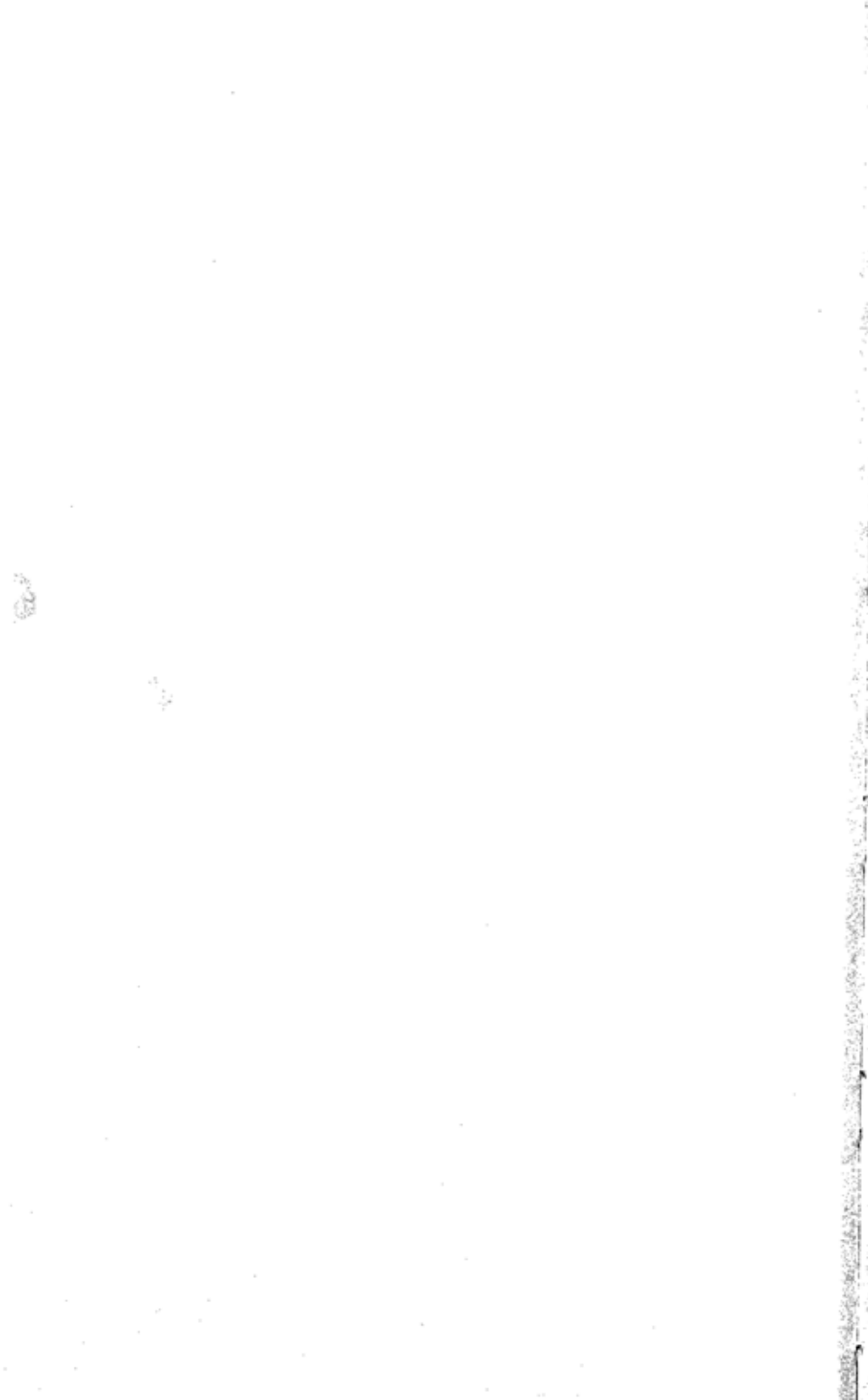
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## *Tourist Party*

ON AUGUST 17th, 1962, I flew into Ulan Bator, the capital of the Mongolian People's Republic, as one of a party of fourteen Western visitors from Germany, the U.S.A. and England.

Although we were supposed to be 'tourists', there was in fact only one real tourist among us. Of the remainder, eleven were connected either with printed journalism or with TV-radio, while the twelfth was the president of an American book publishing firm whose visit was, he contended, mainly connected with his professional interests, and the thirteenth was an anthropologist.

Eight were from Western Germany; four from the U.S.; and John Tiffin, a handsome, witty, young member of the Columbia Broadcasting System's London bureau, and I represented Britain.

The flight from Irkutsk in Eastern Siberia had taken an hour and a half, in an Ilyushin-14 belonging to Mongol Air Lines. (The Soviet Union organised and started M.A.L., and then handed it over to the Mongolian People's Republic as a free gift.) The Mongolian air hostess duly proved to be clad in the *del*, the national dress, consisting of a gaily-coloured, long-skirted, high-collared robe (in her case blue), double-breasted and buttoning down the right side. Flashing a mouth full of gold, she came round twice with a plate of boiled sweets.

Through occasional gaps in the clouds, there were

glimpses of a rather attractive-looking territory below: rolling hills, vast grassy plains, a good deal of timber.

The sun was shining as the aircraft landed and we filed down the ramp in good heart and a mood of pleasant expectation. I think we all had the same sort of vague notion as to what might lie ahead: the yurts, the yaks, the yoghourt; the accomplished herdsmen and cowboys, nomads to a man; a friendly, simple lot, flashing smiles at the stranger and making him welcome within the tent to the ritual of mildly exotic milk derivatives and offerings of meat.

We were all prepared for a certain amount of discomfort; but since this was the first organised party of Western tourists to visit Mongolia since the political thaw following the admission of the Mongolian People's Republic to the United Nations at the end of 1961, we assumed that the authorities would, to the best of their ability, be going out of their way to make the tour enjoyable.

Standing around in a group at the bottom of the ramp, however, first impressions on both sides were none too happy. The Mongolian officials stared in palpably growing horror as a vast mass of photographic impedimenta was unloaded. I had no camera; nor had Arthur Myrland, the courtly Chicago ex-U.S. Navy captain, who at 71 was the oldest member of the party and the only genuine tourist among us; he had paid the \$1,800 (nearly £650) cost of the tour out of his own pocket. The rest were festooned and loaded down with apparatus.

A huge pile of tape-recorders, light-metres, range-finders, moving picture cameras, thousands of rolls of film, both black-and-white and colour, and an astonishing array of still cameras—German, American, Japanese—was building up. Several members of the party each

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had three different cameras at their disposal. The moving picture cameras included both portable machines and the full-scale kind on tripods. The overweight penalties paid on all this on the flight from Moscow had been stupendous, and it was clear that our hosts were already entertaining grave doubts as to the bona fides of the 'tourists'.

In all Communist countries the sight of a camera causes an automatically unfavourable reaction in the breast of the beholder. It is as if a flashing sign were to start announcing "Spy-Spy-Spy"! In Mongolia, cut off for centuries from all contact with the world at large and since 1921 sunk in Communist doctrine, the sudden arrival of this great dump of presumably espionage apparatus was bad news indeed.

Our chief greeter was a man of unsympathetic demeanour. Of medium height, wearing a blue beret and a nondescript dark lounge suit, he had a pale face with prominent cheekbones and eyes which forgot to smile when his mouth did. Facially he did not look much like any of the other Mongolians we saw; indeed, he looked more like a Chinese. He was asked several times, as the days wore on, where he was from, and always answered curtly "From the north". He talked English badly, and with a Russian accent and many of the Russian verbal mannerisms. His last name turned out to be Lotchin, but when asked what his first name was he invariably answered, "Say it is B. Lotchin." As the full flavour and impact of the Lotchin personality was taken in by the group, several interesting theories were later advanced as to what the "B" might stand for.

Lotchin had a high-pitched voice in which he would issue orders to us, but it invariably proved impossible to carry on anything like a normal conversation with him. Any remark, however casual and innocent, was suspect;

everything said, however lightly, was assumed to carry some subtle motive with it, or to have a denigratory inference lurking in its wake. Lotchin chain-smoked peculiar cigarettes. Only about one-third of their length contained tobacco; the remaining two-thirds was fashioned of stiff paper which could be pinched into shape as a holder for the rest of the cigarette. Lotchin would smoke these in the Russian style, the cigarette stuck into the extreme right-hand corner of his lips, and manipulating it between the forefinger and thumb of his right hand, instead of between the forefinger and middle finger, with the back of the hand outwards, as in the West.

He pouted thoughtfully while searching for the right English word, and then, as he spoke, he would half close his right eye, thus lending to his pallid countenance an air of stony slyness. At one point it was understood that Lotchin was chairman of the Union of Mongolian Journalists, in addition to acting as English interpreter for the Mongolian Tourist Agency, but he later strenuously denied the journalistic connection. So far as I was concerned, after the first 48 hours there remained not the slightest doubt that he was a policeman.

Anyway, while we were still trying to strike a chord with Lotchin at the airport, Elliott ("Call me Jimmy—everyone else does") Macrae, another American in the party, found himself in slight difficulties. Jimmy was the 62-year-old president of the E. P. Dutton Publishing Company of New York. Short, dapper, with grey hair parted in the middle, and brown pleading eyes, Jimmy was determined to make friends wherever he went. His was an absolutely genuine desire to be liked and to like others. He was convinced that the rivalries and enmities of the Cold War could be surmounted if only the "ordinary people on both sides" could somehow be



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helped "to communicate genuinely". And to this end, he felt strongly that the desired meeting of minds could best be achieved through the revelation that both sides "deep down" loved the simple works of nature. To reinforce these excellent intentions, Jimmy had come well prepared. In his luggage was a sizeable consignment of what his forebears might well have termed wampum and beads. The 1962 equivalent consisted of large numbers of lipsticks of various tints, ballpoint pens and cigarette lighters.

But in spite of the good will and gifts, it was invariably Jimmy who found himself the victim of an almost daily series of minor mishaps. Already, back in Irkutsk, Jimmy had been in a modicum of trouble. There the photographers in the party had an obsessive desire to see a Trans-Siberian Railway express pause at the local station. The Irkutsk Intourist representative—outstandingly pleasant and helpful throughout our stay there—had regretfully explained that this was the one request he could not meet; regulations governing picture-taking of Russian trains and stations were strict. In vain did Jimmy and others point out to him that staying in Irkutsk without seeing the "fabled" Trans-Siberian Railway in action was "just like going to New York City and not going up the Empire State Building", a simile which left the Intourist man notably unmoved.

Finally, on a solemn promise to leave his camera behind, Jimmy was put on his honour and allowed to go by taxi to the station by himself, after dinner one night, there to watch the trains for an hour or so. All went well until Jimmy, trying to leave, wandered into a waiting-room, found the other door locked and attempted to hurry back to the platform, only to hear the key turning in the door through which he had just come. An interval of plaintive knocking on both doors led to his being

recovered by suspicious officials, who finally released him only with considerable reluctance.

Now at Ulan Bator airport Jimmy struck another snag. He produced a map of Mongolia, which he had acquired from the National Geographic Society of America before leaving New York. The Mongolian Customs officials stiffened and pointed accusingly to rings of ink which had been carefully drawn round the names of various Mongolian towns. What was this, demanded the officials. Why should "Mr. Macrah" be marking up maps of the M.P.R.? It took rather a long time for Jimmy's explanation to gain acceptance, that the National Geographic Society had helpfully marked the map for him, after learning what the itinerary was going to be. Their suspicions thus aroused, the Customs men went through the remainder of Jimmy's effects in tedious detail while the rest of us, long since cleared, watched and waited.

We were sitting in a blue bus, Czech-built I believe, of the type one sees in most of the countries behind the Iron Curtain. From its windows we studied the airfield, the air terminal building and the surrounding countryside.

When one talks of an 'air terminal' in the West, especially in a capital city, a picture flashes into one's mind of a huge place swarming with incessant activity; of public address systems in full blast, of bars, news stalls, restaurants, long rows of telephone booths, information centres, hordes of travellers awaiting their baggage, or being led down the various feed channels to the aircraft by uniformed female receptionists.

At a place like Ulan Bator the situation is laughably otherwise. The airfield is dead, suspicious and resentful. Every move—since there are so few—is carefully watched. Anybody who turns up has to explain his or

her business. The one thing you can be certain of not witnessing is bustle.

When dusk falls, men with rifles slung over their shoulders take over and patrol the few aircraft which linger on the ground. The terminal building looks as though it had been built in the age of Blériot. In fact it was built within the last two years.

In spite of its unstable air, on the airfield itself there appeared to be some permanent fixtures. One of these was a huge helicopter, but the question was not so much when it had last flown as whether it had ever flown at all. It was swathed all over with some form of protective material and had an air of triumphantly moth-balled immobility. The impression of permanence was strengthened by the presence, beneath its ample belly, of a numerous gathering of Mongolians who were cooking something in its shelter.

All around the airfield, cupping the scene and its desultory activities, stood a container of hills. That proved to be common form in Mongolia, for you are almost never out of sight of a hill or mountain of some sort. But I find that inevitably mountains in one part of the world remind me of those in another, and as I travelled about I would identify the Auvergne, the Dolomites, the Pyrenees, and even occasionally, in the gentler manifestations of upland, the Sussex Downs. According to advance report, the Mongolian air has peculiar properties of clarity and stimulus, and this proved to be largely accurate, although the stimulus was evident only in fine weather. So remarkably clear is the atmosphere that eagles, perched on a handy rock, are alleged to be able to spot anything that moves up to 30 miles away. Since there is often nothing moving at all, or, if so, only another eagle, this is at times not of much use to them.

At last, when Jimmy had extricated himself from the Customs, our bus took off on the 10-mile ride into Ulan Bator. This is one of the few sectors of roadway in the country which can lay any claim to be paved. The total of paved road is less than 25 miles, scarcely more than a token offering in a land of 600,000 square miles.

The bus made heavy going of any rise in the road, which it took at a painfully laboured walking pace. We passed beneath a tattily garish archway, standing all alone in the wilderness and decorated with little flags. Perhaps the archway marked the city limits of the capital. Soon we saw our first *yurts* (the Russian word) or *gers* (the Mongolian), the round tents which the Mongolians have lived in and carted round with them for a thousand years, and in which at least 85 per cent. of the population, in spite of eager attempts to modernise the country, still live.

The *ger* is an extremely practical proposition, ideally suited to its purpose. Although it can be quickly assembled and taken apart and is easy to transport, it provides warmth and reliable, strong shelter against the fearful storms and disastrously low winter temperatures (50 degrees Fahrenheit below is a commonplace) which visit the country.

It consists of an expandable trellised foundation topped by wooden ribs sticking downwards like partly-collapsed wheel spokes and attached to a central roof ring supported by two poles. Sheets of felt go over the trellis and the ribs, then canvas. A stove pipe pokes out of the top and the roof vent is covered with plastic. The interior is often gay and undoubtedly it is cosy. There are bright rugs on the floor, and the wooden ribs, painted in brilliant tints, provide a most satisfactory design.

As long as the *ger* (snowdrop white outside) remains as nomadic as its owners traditionally were, it forms a most

acceptable part of the landscape. Unfortunately a growing number of them are permanently sited inside Ulan Bator. These may enjoy such urban advantages as electric light, and radio aerials in profusion are aloft, but the general effect is sadly slummy. *Gers* in cities combine the worst features of cheap Western prefabs and stationary motor caravans. They get dirty and discoloured, and the general effect of an urban *ger* encampment, usually surrounded by a morass of mud and ruts, is squalid.

As the bus banged along, Dr. Lawrence Krader, the anthropologist of the party, leaned across the aisle and laid his hand gently on my elbow. Dr. Krader, of the National Academy of Sciences—National Research Council in Washington, D.C., Professor of Anthropology at American University in Washington and Editor of the *International Directory of Anthropologists*, was full of erudition on a surprisingly wide range of topics. He was by no means reluctant to air the fact in a carrying, demanding sort of voice, and came to be known to one and all as 'The Professor'.

"One thing must be borne in mind," he now said to me. "There is not the slightest resemblance between the Mongolian and Chinese languages."

"Really?" I rejoined.

"Absolutely none," he reiterated. "If one wished to give a very loose approximation—and, of course, those of us in the academic world have little desire to do any such thing—one could say that the modern language which most resembles Mongolian, however remotely, is Turkish."

"Ah, Turkish," I echoed, nodding encouragingly.

"Yes. The Turks originally came from here. This central Asiatic plateau is interesting, among other reasons, because great streams of people have left it, from

time to time—I suppose you have heard of Genghis Khan and his hordes—but nobody has ever come in from the outside.”

“I wonder why that should have been,” I said, gazing idly at a *yurt* encampment we were passing. “But you were talking of the similarity between the Mongolian and Turkish languages.”

The Professor slightly tightened his grip on my elbow. “When I say that there is a resemblance,” he averred, “you must realise that it is a distant one. About as much resemblance, in fact, as between the English and Russian tongues.”

“I see.”

“Now,” went on The Professor, “has it ever occurred to you to wonder how Genghis Khan’s victories were achieved? How was it possible that these untutored hordes, flowing from the Asiatic heartland, were able to defeat the very flower of European mediaeval chivalry?”

“A good question,” I put in.

“Their technique was simple yet effective. They had the firepower. Genghis Khan’s mounted bowmen would pretend to attack the waiting ranks of heavily-armoured knights. At the last moment—masters of dissimulation—they would make as though to flee. The knights would break ranks in pursuit. Then the Mongols would turn in their saddles and shoot back over their shoulders with their complex bows. Their arrows could pierce an inch of bronze at 100 yards range. No one could stand up to them. There you have the explanation.”

“Thank you.”

By this time Ulan Bator was coming into sight, down in a shallow valley to the left. From a distance the city—population 180,000—looks moderately attractive. A series of large public buildings has been run up in the past few years, contrived of marble or stucco, mostly



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white or off-white in tint. There are such status symbols as a power station and sewage disposal plant, a moving picture studio, a flour mill, a handsome sports stadium, and shoe and textile factories. A minor river called the Tuula winds past, and the bridge over it is new and florid. Behind the capital there stands a range of dun-coloured low mountains.

As one gets nearer, it turns out that things are by no means so spruce. All over the Communist world, with, so far as I know, the single exception of Rumania, no attempt ever seems to be made to clear up after the builders have gone away. A new apartment block, its cement, as often as not, soon starting to crack, is left to fester in a frightful mess of churned earth, piles of junk, bits of planking and punctured buckets. The side streets are invariably nightmarish glimpses of non-gracious living. Gnarled and wrinkled tracks—marshes in winter, dust storms in summer—lead to thickets of tumbledown hovels. The Communists seem to think that one fairly imposing main street is sufficient to bemuse the casual visitor. It does not apparently occur to them that anyone is capable of looking past the superficial and often rather pathetic layer of prestige stucco.

Ulan Bator is very much the case in point. For centuries it was simply a handy congregation point for wandering herdsmen, and even its name, not surprisingly, was changed a total of nine times. Its penultimate name was Urga, and until the end of the 19th century about all you could have found there was a Buddhist monastery and the inevitable collection of *gers*. As recently as twenty years ago, Ulan Bator (meaning Red Hero, so named after Sukhe Bator, the leader of the 1920-21 revolution, who died in 1923) was a huddle of shoddy bungalows. Then, as Russia and China sized each other up after the Second World War and the Communist

victory on the Chinese mainland—and both decided warily to leave Mongolia at least nominally independent—things began to change materially for the inhabitants.

China and Russia competed for popularity with sizeable aid programmes. China sent in 'labour brigades', estimated at present to number 40,000 to 60,000 men, and she undertook helpful irrigation projects. Russia, besides setting up the Mongol Air Line, turned over the Mongolian section of the Moscow-Peking railway to the Mongols, and her technicians have been busy helping to prospect for and determine the extent of the important mineral deposits in various parts of the country.

Other Western nations of the Communist bloc, notably Czechoslovakia and East Germany, have weighed in with specialised help, and the general result has included the planning and building of the 'new' Ulan Bator. This shop window at least has the merit of avoiding the neo-Victorianism of so much Moscow construction. The buildings are of more acceptable design, the tints are light, and there are some pillared offerings which achieve a certain grace. But the whole thing reminded me inescapably of a grandiose film set. Seen from the front the effect is fine. But go round to the back and look at the sides and the illusion vanishes.

Anyway, our bus went trundling along the Champs Elysées of Ulan Bator, past the imposing government buildings—outside one of which an enormously larger-than-life-size statue of Stalin, an unwonted smile playing about his lips, still stands—past the Russian-style wooden houses with elaborately-decorated window frames, the cantonments for the Chinese labourers, and the lurking flocks of *gers*, their presence ill-concealed by battered wooden fences round their camp perimeters.

The people on the streets were an odd-looking lot. Again a film set came to mind. During the coffee break

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in the making of some Biblical epic, the incongruous becomes commonplace, as Roman gladiators puff American cigarettes, Nero dons ski trousers to keep his legs warm, and St. Paul takes a quick swig from a handy hip flask. So in Ulan Bator the mixture on view was as unconvincing as a cocktail put together by someone's maiden aunt.

Since nearly all Mongols start riding at the age of five or so, the incidence of bandy legs is unavoidably high. The facial tints have an extraordinarily wide range. Very light-skinned citizens intermingle with people almost as dark as negroes. In between you encounter copper, primrose, mahogany, teak, fawn, straw, and many with that characteristically scalded look on their high cheekbones.

The distinguished American expert on Mongolia, Mr. Owen Lattimore, has written that "the Mongols do not particularly consider themselves Asians". I find this astonishing. The appearance of the Mongolians, with their slit eyes, high cheekbones and strikingly un-Caucasian skin tints, seemed to me to epitomise everything that the average Westerner thinks of as Asian. And I should have thought that their new-found and intense nationalism is based as much on the fact of their Asianness as on anything else.

The garb on view ran the gamut from the immemorial to the reach-me-down. Herdsmen, apparently just into town from the steppe, stumped along in their high-coned felt hats, and green, blue, red and yellow *dels*, tied at the waist with a gaily-contrasting sash. Most of them wore high boots made of felt. Most of the women wore more of the same, with black pigtailed over their shoulders and down their backs. But among them went the moderns, sporting plastic mackintoshes, shoddy lounge suits looking as though they would shrink in half

at the first rainstorm, scruffy sandals, wedgies, platform shoes and the unattractive grey footgear of East Germany. The Western-dressed women wore garish blouses and jumpers, ill-fitting skirts, and scarves on their heads.

Though some of the women were moderately comely, I do not think that I saw a single really attractive woman by Western standards the whole time I was in Mongolia. In China, Japan, and many other parts of the Orient the position is far different, but, where looks are concerned, the Mongolian girls seem to have taken the wrong turning at some point. Also, I dislike gold teeth and, throughout the Communist world, gold flashes nearly every time anyone opens his or her mouth.

Occasionally one comes across a tall, hefty Mongolian man, but by and large, though strong, they are small and slight. The wearing of the *del* and sash often gives an unfortunate effect, because the *del* tends to be bunched out just above the sash, so that even a man with a good figure acquires in profile a paunchy look, in regrettable contrast to the Cossack, with his nipped-in waistline.

The bus finally hove to before the hotel and, an unusually homogeneous party of tourists, we disembarked.

Four of the West Germans were photographers. Lothar Reinbacher, aged 40, represented the *Neue Illustrierte* of Cologne. He was a fully qualified physician and surgeon, who over a decade earlier had decided to forsake medicine in favour of professional photography and had, he said, never regretted it.

Wolfgang Krimmel—a World War Two U-boat captain, genial, grey-haired and in his late fifties—was a photographer from Hamburg.

Gernot Anderle, at 28 the youngest in the party, worked as a cameraman in Munich for the American Broadcasting Company. He bore a certain facial

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resemblance to President Kennedy, if the President were to disregard all the rules of prudent diet. The fourth, Alfred Strobel, worked for the *Bunte Illustrierte* of Offenburg, Baden, and was the only German in the party who spoke no English. Fortyish, with thinning blond hair, he was reticent to the point of reclusion and his habitual expression was one of the utmost glumness. In spite of his gloom, the fact that he was a Bavarian caused endless hilarity among his German colleagues.

Gunter Wichman, a freelance from Hamburg, also tended to silence, probably because he was still suffering from the effects of a bad leg accident some months before.

The remaining three West German 'tourists' were all experts on Communist affairs. In fact, Harry Hamm, the fortyish representative of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, is West Germany's most respected Kremlinologist. And Erwin Behrens and Klaus Arnsperger, both in their late thirties, are correspondents in Moscow: Behrens for the West German Radio and Annsperger for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Fourteenth member of the party was Charles P. Arnot, aged 45, newspaperman turned TV correspondent, formerly with United Press and a war correspondent in World War Two, and now one of the American Broadcasting Company's top men.

How had we all come together in Ulan Bator in mid-August, 1962?

Myrland explained that he had been looking through the *Christian Science Monitor* one day, when on an inside page he had found his attention caught by a small story concerning a projected visit to Mongolia. Reading on, he had found that the tour was being arranged by an organisation named Cosmos Travel Co., of New York, and that a few bookings might still be accepted. Forthwith he had called New York long distance, talked to

officials of the Cosmos Co., and indicated that he would like to go along. A pause of some weeks ensued and then suddenly he was told that the tour was leaving in a few days and was he still interested? Pausing only to fork out \$1,800, off went Myrland.

The Cosmos Travel Co. is master-minded by a man called Rhiner, whom I would enjoy meeting some day. He is by all accounts—Jimmy knows him—a person of demonic energy and determination. No obstacle is too great, once his mind is made up. It was the arrival in New York to take their places in the United Nations at the end of 1961 of Mongolia's three delegates which set Rhiner's agile mind aglow. Soon he was calling on them and urging them to grant visas to would-be visitors to their country. Permission came and Rhiner set about gathering together his initial group.

Somehow the biggest interest was created in West Germany, where, I think, Cosmos may have an office in Bonn. My colleague, Colin Lawson, the Bonn correspondent of the *Daily Express*, heard about it and alerted the London office of the *Express*. That was how I got into the expedition.

The hotel was finished in 1961 and is a handsome affair. In fact some members of our party rather overdid the dazzled bewilderment with which they greeted its appearance, and Mr. Lotchin, who had started by smiling proudly as he led us through the lobby, began frowning at the repeated assurances from the West German contingent: "Bot dis is pee-utiful. We haf expected *noosing* like zis in Ulan Bator."

The place was built by the Chinese and decorated and furnished by the Czechs. They made an excellent job of it, the furnishings being in the best sort of Scandinavian-modern-as-tomorrow's-dawn style. True, the lifts never operated because the Mongolians didn't seem quite to

have got the knack as yet, and the plugs had been stolen from all the wash-basins, but by and large it was comfortable to the edge of luxury.

Readers who may be unfamiliar with the Communist world must, however, bear in mind an important point. As with the airport terminal building, the word 'hotel' should not be allowed to mean what it would mean in the West. This Ulan Bator hostelry was essentially a silent place. In the lobby a solemn little woman sold stamps for a couple of hours in the morning. Another dozed over a table at which the newspapers of Communism—but not, I think, the *Daily Worker*—were available. In a room giving off the lobby a bank official would turn up erratically and unpredictably to exchange foreign cash and traveller's cheques. But in the lobby itself there was little or no *va et vien*. Anyone lingering casually there came at once under obtrusive scrutiny. The doorman was a granite-faced goon in a sky-blue uniform, the trouser-legs of which ended at mid-shin. The inmates of the hotel tended to scurry rather than walk. One would encounter an East German edging his way along a corridor with a hunted look. Or a Czech, briefcase clutched beneath his arm, who, thinking we were Russians, would walk forward fawningly to shake hands, and then, realising his mistake just in time, make off again at a fair turn of speed.

There were a fair number of staff, nearly all female, all dressed in immaculate *dels*, and all with coldly-observant manner. Communism is adept at un-sexing the female, and women hotel officials can safely be lauded as among its finest achievements in this field. Once the bearded Dr. Reinbacher, frustrated time and again in his endeavours to get a shot of a *ger* encampment, quietly mounted the stairs from the second floor of the hotel, where he was lodged, to the fifth floor. From one

of the topmost windows he knew he could get a good picture of some nearby tents. Eagerly he tiptoed across the landing, thinking himself to be alone. But hardly had he opened a window and poised himself for the *ger*-encompassing shot, when an arm snaked over his shoulder and slammed the window to. Reinbacher looked round indignantly. Behind him stood the second-floor housemother, frowning and wagging her finger at him. She had followed him silently upstairs, and with much plucking at his sleeve and numerous angry darts with her finger downwards, she now made it clear that he was trespassing and must immediately return to his own floor under her escort.

The staff, with one splendid and shining exception, who shall receive due tribute, were not the sort of retainers who would have been welcome at, say, Brown's Hotel in London.



## CHAPTER TWO

### *“De Plan”*

THAT FIRST evening after our arrival at the hotel things soon started to go sour. Mr. Lotchin, after a long conference with the management, began handing out room assignments and there were indignant ejaculations as it was seen that everybody was supposed to ‘double up’, two to a room.

My professional life is largely devoted to travel and must of necessity include considerable discomfort. But there are certain avoidable forms of annoyance and harassment which nothing will induce me to accept and to the threat of which I react with vehemence. High on this list stands the suggestion that I share a room with anyone.

It has been tried on me all over the world—and all over the world a trail of furious scenes in hotel lobbies bears testimony to my refusal to be subjected to what I regard as a degrading process. There is absolutely nothing to be said in favour of ‘doubling up’ and 99 times out of 100 it is unnecessary. Hotel managements in the West attempt it through cupidity; those in Communist countries because their officialdom treats human beings as a herd. In Communist countries nobody travels alone, but always as a member of a ‘delegation’ and they seem genuinely taken aback at one’s protests over the bedrooms. It was not that in Ulan Bator they were short of space; the hotel boasts 200 rooms, and not more than a quarter of these were occupied.

Another reason put forward by Reinbacher later for this insistence on doubling up was that, given the Mongolian obsession about watching everyone all the time, it seemed only natural to them that we should want to share rooms so that no one could be left alone to get up to any jiggery-pokery. I think there may have been something to that theory.

Of course it is all wrong to make a scene and is especially frowned on in England. But the fact is that it so often brings results. A flaming row, in which my fury is more apparent than real, has led to a satisfactory outcome over and over again. On this room business I consider that every last clenched fist, every pounded desk and every shout of rage is more than worth while. There are far more snorers around than may be supposed, and on the few occasions when I have been weak enough or too tired to hold out for my own room, I always seem to draw one of them. During Eisenhower's tour of the Middle East and North Africa at the end of 1959 I spent three hideous nights in the Ashoka Hotel in New Delhi, sharing a room with Mr. Robert Considine of Hearst Newspapers.

I yield to no one in my admiration for Bob—in the daytime. Witty, easy-going, a marvellous writer and shrewd observer, he makes the ideal colleague on an arduous assignment such as the Ike trip. But when bedtime looms he becomes a menace. It seemed to me that Bob started to snore while his head was still on the way down, even before it had touched the pillow. Nothing has ever been known to stop a snorer in full snort and there was only one thing to do. Luckily our quarters had a private bathroom attached, so I collected my mattress and bedding, lugged them into the bathroom and spent three nights on the floor in there with the door closed against the noise.

Again, when you have two newspapermen sharing a room it is long odds against both wanting to go to sleep at the same time. One of them is almost certain to be intent on banging out an overnight epic of two or three thousand words—and next to snoring, the penetrating sound of a typewriter is high on the list of sleep-killers.

At Ulan Bator a satisfactory compromise was finally achieved. Charles Arnot and I were supposed to share a bedroom, but on inspection we found it to be an outsize suite, so we ordered one of the beds to be carried into the drawing room, where I was very comfortable. This was as well, for later on in the trip Charles was revealed as a tenor snorer in the Considine bracket. As it was, the only sound which ever penetrated the door linking our rooms was that of Charles busily talking to himself as he tape-recorded a swift message for the American Broadcasting Company. "This is Charles P. Arnot, speaking to you from the windswept uplands of Central Mongolia . . ."

I was fortunate to have Charles as a semi-room-mate. He is a most considerate man, with an equable disposition and uproarious sense of humour. We hit it off from the beginning, and if ever I had to go on a really long and dreary grind—something like a raft expedition or a couple of months in the Himalayas—I would give a hearty cheer at finding him a member of the party.

To give you an idea of his impishness: during the war Charles was a correspondent in the Pacific. One night some Japanese planes came over the island on which he found himself, dropped bombs and flew away. Charles wrote a routine story, in which he said that a few Japanese aircraft had made an unsuccessful raid, and took it in to show the naval censor.

The censor suddenly stiffened and looked up. "This won't do, Arnot," he cried.

"What's wrong?" asked Charles.

"You should know the regulations by this time. You know that we never mention the number of enemy aircraft involved in a raid."

"But I haven't mentioned a number."

"Yes you have—you say 'a few'."

"So what?"

"Everybody knows that 'a few' means three!"

"*What?*"

"That's right. 'A few' means three."

Nothing would shake the censor's contention, although Charles did his dogged best. The phrase was cut out, and Charles retreated enraged.

Retribution followed. Alerted and rehearsed by Charles, the members of the corps of correspondents took to asking one another the time as the censor went by. To which the loud answer would be "It's just a quarter to few."

Or "What time's chow?"

"Half past several."

"I'm turning in soon—it's already 25 to plenty . . ."

The Czechs had done a nice job on the rooms. The beds were not particularly comfortable, in that they imitated the Hilton idea, which I dislike, of being turned into sofas in the daytime. Pillows and bedding were kept in cupboards. As in many parts of the U.S.S.R., nothing is tucked in. All you get, beside the pillow, is a billowing eiderdown, which floats on your torso or drifts floorwards from time to time through the night.

But the room's general effect was pleasing and included an enormous empty glass-fronted bookshelf attached, without brackets or other visible means of support, to the wall.

From my window I had a view of the rear of a heroic-sized statue of Lenin. He was depicted as walking away

dynamically but carelessly, trailing on the ground behind him his huge stone coat. The Mongols are Leninophiles, because a share of Mongolian blood ran in his veins. They are all aware that Genghis Khan is the one Mongolian whose name is well known abroad, but seeing that eight hundred years have gone by since his day, they are understandably anxious for some new champion to enter the lists. While they wait, Lenin forms an acceptable standby.

Lenin's statue stands in a tiny, shaggy little park of culture and rest. In the Communist world, no one ever mows the grass and no one ever trims the edges of the flower-beds. I believe it possible that there are no lawn mowers anywhere behind the Iron Curtain, Russia included. This could change. When I was in Russia in 1954 and 1955, they curled their lips in contempt when I asked about lawn tennis. Unknown, they said. But nowadays it is not only considered a splendid thing for the Russians to play tennis, but in Siberia they have huge statues of tennis players about to serve. But no lawn mowers at present. So in Ulan Bator Lenin stands there surrounded by the vegetation in disarray.

Beyond Lenin I could see the show-piece main street, complete with a few traffic lights and a policeman in Russian uniform. An occasional bus went past, a number of lorries, Russian-made jeeps, and cyclists, both push and motor. I could never take that main street seriously. It always struck me as a laborious piece of make-believe, put there to impress the visitors. There was a sense of unreality about it. On its far side there stood one of the few solidly constructed buildings which pre-date the present modernisation campaign. It went up, I would say, some time in the thirties, and houses one of the satellite embassies.

Behind all that stood the hills, just outside the capital.

Where in relation to London you would encounter Golders Green, or to New York, Jackson Heights, when leaving Ulan Bator you find yourself climbing a hill named, perhaps, The Camel That Dropped Dead While Tending Its Young In The Blizzard.

I was still gazing from the window that first evening when my reverie was interrupted by a knuckle on the door. In reply to my call, in came the messenger.

While Mr. Lotchin was the English interpreter for the group, there were at least two of the Germans, Gunther Wichman and Alfred Strobel, who spoke little English, and although Klaus Arnsperger was fairly proficient in English, he preferred, as does everyone, to deal in his own tongue.

There now entered the official German-speaking interpreter. This was Dr. Navan-Junden, and the German members of the party became much attached to him. He was a short and stocky man, with a remarkably massive head. His expression was habitually thoughtful and good-humoured. Deep lines ran down his face from the edges of his nostrils to the ends of his lips. He invariably seemed to be watching, listening and observing. He was as civilised and sympathetic as Mr. Lotchin proved to be unsympathetic and brusque. His hair was plentiful and jet black, although he was nearly 60. Our German colleagues said that his knowledge of their language was first-rate. He had been to Berlin in pre-war days. His mouth was full of gold teeth, and for that reason I called him Gold Tooth, the name by which he will henceforth be referred to, and which was adopted by most of the party. The most striking thing about him was that the hazel-coloured irises of his eyes were each surrounded by a slender ring of iridescent blue.

Gold Tooth's normal job was as an official in the Ministry of Foreign Trade where he acted as liaison

man with the numerous East German technicians visiting Mongolia. He had been lent for this visit in view of the large German contingent. It seemed clear that there was little love lost between him and Mr. Lotchin and they rarely spoke to one another unless it was absolutely necessary.

“Time for suffer,” said Gold Tooth. “Kindly come down at once.”

Charles and I went down to the first floor, where we found that a large private dining-room had been set aside for our party. This was the first intimation we had of the policy governing our visit: we were to be kept segregated from all contact with the Mongolian public except for a couple of carefully-arranged and strictly-controlled meetings in government-run rest houses. For the rest, we were apparently regarded as so many political Typhoid Marys.

I later discovered that the general dining-room for the Mongolians was on the other side of the hotel, with a separate street entrance to it. There was also a bar, which the Czechs had hopefully installed, but that stood derelict.

As we took our places at table in our private room, it was evident that at all events we were not to be starved. The table was covered with dishes containing caviare, dried fish, chopped eggs, shredded meat, spring onions, cold lamb, cold garlic salami and cucumbers, chunks of cheese made of pressed dried camel's milk, and vegetable salad. At each place stood a vast bowl of *koumiss* (the Russian word) or *airag* (Mongolian). This is the national beverage of the country, and until recently etiquette demanded that on entering anyone's *ger* three or more bowls of the confection should be downed. Not all members of the party found it as repulsive as I did. It is made of mare's milk which becomes slightly fermented

and which bubbles in a quietly menacing sort of way. The gross whiff of the stables as I lifted the bowl to my lips was enough to deprive me of any wish for further investigation. The Mongolians swear by the stuff and are constantly lapping it up with every appearance of enjoyment. In the rest houses and sanatoria huge and constantly replenished china crocks of *koumiss* stand on the landings at the disposal of one and all. The Mongolians tell you that *koumiss* is a great help to longevity and general fitness, and according to Owen Lattimore Russian doctors too are inclined to think that it may have useful properties in the prevention and cure of tuberculosis.

On our first visit to a farm I found myself sitting in the head man's *ger*, right in front of the host. Unwilling to seem rude, I braced myself, and did succeed in getting down the politely standard three bowls of *koumiss*, but the ordeal was severe and from then on I never touched it again. The initial enthusiasm of the other members of the party also dwindled, so that our hosts stopped altogether trying to tempt us with the stuff at meals. The Mongolians herd not only yaks, but also camels, cattle, sheep, goats and horses—and moreover they industriously milk all these animals and consume the results. Down the centuries and through the long winter evenings, having not much else to do, they have displayed a regrettable ingenuity at producing variants of the milk base.

For example, there is a yoghurt made from camel's milk which I emphatically fail to recommend. Then how about a nice mug of *tarag*, made of goat's milk? Not if I can help it. The only item in this extensive field that I in any degree welcomed was a clear liquid with no discernible smell, slightly intoxicant, tasting something like *saké*. We were given it once in a farm *ger* but never



came across it again. I think its name was *undarni arxi*, but research failed to make it clear whether it was yet another distilled variant of some beast's milk or was distilled from grain or potatoes.

That first night when most of us had eaten our fill from the profusion of dishes, we discovered belatedly that this was intended merely as the hors d'œuvres. On came the soup, a sort of borscht made of tinned beets and other vegetables and containing small hunks of meat. By and large, apart from the Russian caviare, the soup was the most acceptable item of diet during the visit. The borscht was followed by plates piled high with garlicky frankfurters and mounds of boiled potatoes and cabbage. Charles ordered a bottle of local vodka and others tried the beer. The beer was dreadful, a feeble offering which smelt like hair-oil and tasted like gruel. There was something about the dry Mongolian atmosphere which made most of us constantly thirsty—I could scarcely get enough liquids to satisfy this desire. We drank huge quantities of that Russian mineral water which Mr. Khrushchev loses no opportunity of boasting on American TV when he is visiting the U.S.A., bottled lemonade from China, and tea, served piping hot, Russian style without milk, in glasses with metal holders—and very good indeed. The vodka proved ruinously expensive. It came in the small-sized bottles in which Russian vodka is marketed in Britain and cost the equivalent of five guineas a time. When I complained about this to Mr. Lotchin, he smiled triumphantly and explained that in order to cut down drunkenness, from which the country at one time suffered badly, “the young people of Mongolia” had enthusiastically helped to push through a law whereby the price of the hard stuff was placed at levels making it a rare luxury for the ordinary worker.

After the frankfurters came another course consisting of a number of dumplings, shaped like artichokes, and containing meat centres. By this time no one felt like touching anything more, whereupon, disappointed at the sight of plates pushed aside with their contents intact, the head waiter tore out of the dining-room and triumphantly returned a few minutes later with platters of fried eggs and mushrooms. The head waiter was a splendid man—quite the nicest Mongolian I met during the whole stay. He was under five feet high, and at first glance might have passed for a male impersonator, for his face had an attractive grave purity which could have been a girl's. His was one of the 'scalded' Mongolian skins, something like a Red Indian's, and his features were tiny and neat, as were his movements. His mien was grave, he worked very hard and took endless trouble. He invariably wore a tidy little dinner jacket with watered silk facings. His name was Batoch. Batoch's knowledge of English was slight and built largely about the phrase "Please don't mention it". "Good morning, Batoch," one would say. "Please don't mention it," he would rejoin, bowing gravely. His assistant was a little waitress, who contrived to be even shorter than Batoch, but was merry where Batoch was grave, and equally polite and deferential.

It was, I believe, that first night at dinner that Jimmy Macrae got right down to discussing with Mr. Lotchin the two things which were uppermost in his mind. These were to have a meeting with Ts Damdinsuren, the head of Mongolia's Writers' Union, which edits all books produced in the country, and himself a leading novelist; and to place the first telephone call ever made from Ulan Bator to New York City. All arrangements for the implementation of the second of these gestures had, it appeared, already been made at the New York end.

Jimmy explained that he is a personal friend of the head of the New York telephone company and that the successful completion of the call, besides “making history”, would undoubtedly do much to further the cause of American-Mongolian friendship and “mark another milestone in the onward march of international communications”.

Mr. Lotchin seemed singularly unmoved at this plea and continued to smoke his paper-stemmed cigarette, with his right eye partly closed.

“Surely you’ve heard of Telstar?” asked Jimmy.

“How much is de push?” countered Lotchin.

In spite of some further spirited attempts by Jimmy at softening Lotchin up, including the display of a large collection of colour photographs of his imposing home in Connecticut, its gardens, swimming pool and his elder daughter in her coming-out gown, and the production of an artifact to which he is especially attached, namely a pickle spoon with a pincers movement operated by a button in the handle and bearing the initials ‘C.D.’ which Jimmy declared to have once been the property of Charles Dickens (“Seems only right and appropriate that a modern publisher should own the pickle spoon of a famous erstwhile writer,” said Jimmy with a touch of mysticism in his manner), deadlock continued.

“You see,” said Lotchin, “I not post office man. Tomorrow we see post office man. Maybe.”

This reminded Jimmy of something else. “I got a whole lot of important mail coming here,” he said. At this I shuddered—but I could only bow to the extraordinary optimism and sense of faith in the efficiency of others indicated by the words. Until quite recently Mongolia and Nepal were the only two countries in the world which did not belong to the International Postal

Union, and the notion of having important correspondence sent to Ulan Bator in one's wake would not have occurred to many. Lotchin shrugged.

"No, but seriously," persisted Jimmy, "when the mail gets here, will it be sent to the hotel or will it stay in the post office?"

Lotchin's reply proved to be a gem of non-helpfulness. "Maybe," he said.

Most of our party were intrigued by the presence of the two American laymen, the 62-year-old Macrae and the 71-year-old Myrland. What, we wondered, could have possibly induced these two, both men of means, both living pleasant and comfortably happy lives back in the U.S.A., to have come to Mongolia? The rest of us were all there perforce; it was part of our job. But there had been no sort of compulsion on the book publisher and the retired naval captain to embark on this arduous two weeks.

True, Jimmy maintained that his visit had professional overtones, but these turned out to consist entirely of the hoped-for conversation with Damdinsuren, and it was unclear to me just what he thought might emerge from it. Putting aside Charles Arnot's ribald suggestion that Jimmy was planning a sweeping campaign to provide paperbacks for the yaks, I think the answer in Jimmy's case was a determination to be behind the scenes, in the know and in the picture. He told me that he does a good deal of lecturing and is in brisk demand for "talks and addresses to groups large and small" when home in the U.S.A., and it was not difficult to envisage him, pointer in hand, lantern slides following one another in a burgeoning stream on the wall screen, holding forth to a riveted audience of Oddfellows in New Canaan, Connecticut. Jimmy proved prodigiously industrious and almost indefatigable. I doubt if anyone made as

copious and detailed a set of notes as he, and he must have taken several thousand pictures. If the newspapermen gathered to interview a Mongolian economic expert, there would be Jimmy writing away furiously to get down the Q-and-A. Did we settle down to talk to the head of a hospital, it would probably be Jimmy who asked the most questions.

One day he told me something of his father's rise from rags to riches. His father at the end of the last century was office boy in the Dutton publishing house in New York, at that time run by some fearsome and tyrannical figure of whom everyone stood in awe. One winter's day the office boy arrived for work before anyone else, blue with cold. His teeth chattering, he decided to make a fire in the grate, which had always remained empty for as long as anyone could recall. He found some sticks of wood and an old newspaper, and had got things going nicely when in stalked the boss. The boss stared at the flames, then roared, "Who lit that?"

Quaking and already figuratively reaching for his tattered trilby, Macrae senior owned up.

There was a pause. Then the boss shouted, "For all these years that fireplace has stood empty. Now you have shown gumption enough to light a fire in it. Good for you. I predict a bright future for you, my lad." And the forecast proved correct.

Arthur Myrland was the one true tourist among us. I gathered that he travels a great deal, and for most of the time he is accompanied by his wife. He early on sized up Lotchin, and whispered to me, "If I were ever a prisoner of war, I would just hate to have that guy as camp commandant, I'll tell you that."

Unlike Jimmy, Arthur Myrland makes no use of the information and impressions which he acquires abroad.

He is a member of the Explorers' Club of Chicago, and he modestly admitted that he might perhaps describe something of his Mongolian travels to individual members when he got home. But the idea of delivering a formal lecture or writing a paid-for piece in a publication appeared to appal him. "I am too lazy," he murmured apologetically.

Arthur Myrland was to me a fascinating figure. His courtly demeanour and apparent determination to make the best of things cracked rather notably a couple of times. He was forever trying to make the Mongolians feel happier by flattery. "Isn't that beautiful?" he would sigh, gazing at an overcrowded altar in a Buddhist monastery. While an official was emitting a long stream of Mongolian—and Mongolian sounds something like deep fat on the bubble—Myrland would sit nodding his head sagely in apparent encouragement. "*Sain bainu?*" he would gravely intone as he was introduced.

Both Jimmy and Arthur Myrland had read and re-read—Jimmy read it a total of nine times—an article by Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, William O. Douglas, which appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine*, dealing with Douglas's visit to Mongolia in 1961.

The article was bland, and my guess is that Justice Douglas, who was accompanied by his wife Mercedes, was hoping for a second invitation to Mongolia.

Justice Douglas had, as far as I could see, practically no word of criticism of Mongolia, although at one point he did describe some of the sanitary arrangements as "makeshift". Indeed I was intrigued to see how far Justice Douglas, of the U.S. Supreme Court, and Mr. Ivor Montagu, a politically far-left Britisher, who some years ago wrote a book called *Land of Blue Sky*, agreed on the glories of the new Mongolia.

An article by Justice Douglas in the *National Geographic Magazine* is something to be noted, and Jimmy noted it word for word. It became his Bible, and when Justice Douglas indicated certain patterns of behaviour, Jimmy was the first to follow them. Wrote Mr. Douglas: “A traveller who waves at a Mongol *arat* (herdsman) or villager always receives a return greeting, accompanied by a beaming smile that shows wonderfully white teeth. ‘*Sain bainu?*’ (‘How do you do?’) brings a hearty smile in town or country.”

That set Jimmy off on a waving jag. He was constantly waving through bus windows, out of jeeps, from balconies, into tents, in shops, temples, streets and steppes. The response was a trifle meagre. The beaming smiles that showed wonderfully white teeth remained largely unforthcoming. The return waves were on the whole rare.

The matter of the telephone call to New York still in abeyance, Lotchin rose and told us that we were expected downstairs in the office of the vice-president of the Tourist Agency. We trooped down and jammed ourselves into a tiny, airless room, very hot and soon filled with cigarette smoke.

The vice-president, named Sharhu, was another man whose manner could not be described as oncoming. I wonder what the Mongolian authorities were about when they agreed to turn over their fledgling tourist industry to such grim-faced, humourless and unfriendly figures as these. Sharhu gave us a brief and formal welcome and then announced, through Lotchin, that it would be necessary to elect “a leader”. A leader? we echoed, puzzled. What for? Because, explained Lotchin, we must have “a responsible person” who would answer for the whole group, transmit questions, comments or complaints from the rest of the group, and be

ready to transmit Lotchin's information and orders back. This novel encounter with doctrinaire regimentation took us by surprise, but we decided that no harm would be done by agreeing. Since the West Germans were the largest contingent, it appeared seemly that they should provide the 'leader', and Dr. Reinbacher, the bearded and lively man from Cologne, was forthwith elected by acclaim. I think he was rather gratified, but on the other hand I think, although I may be wrong, that The Professor was a mite mortified.

We now committed a major collective blunder, which was to haunt us for the rest of the journey. Lotchin announced that he would read out De Plan. This he did, very slowly and carefully and in detail, for each of the thirteen days ahead. I remember thinking it strange that even the various meal times were noted, but, scribbling down the itinerary as it was read out, I concluded—for these were still the opening hours of the project—that the Mongolian Tourist Agency was out to impress with its efficiency.

Beside me Arthur Myrland was registering pleasure at certain parts of the litany. References to visits to the wrestling matches and an archery display brought a "Swell!" from him, and when the historic name of Karakorum was mentioned he murmured, "Why, that's just *wonderful*."

When Lotchin stopped reading, he looked up and glanced round at his listeners. "Is De Plan approved?" he asked.

Everyone nodded in complaisant agreement. All in all, it sounded very feasible; a visit to the Gobi Desert, the Karakorum touch, quite a lot of travel, and so forth. I had some mental reservations concerning one or two of the items—four hours in the State Museum at Ulan Bator, for example, was going to be skipped



by at least one member of the party—but on the whole, yes. I think that most people, at any rate from the West, who have such a programme presented to them take it as only a rough-and-ready basis for what they will actually do. Something may be left out here and there, and—if the tourists get a good idea or remember something which they had been especially keen on seeing or doing—other items may be added later. Apart from a visit to a rest house on the twelfth day, where we were told we would be given “a nice rest”, no provision was made for any free time. But, as we were to discover, free time is something unknown in Mongolia. So there we were—and De Plan had been accepted.

John Tiffin now spoke up. His problem was considerable. Because the Russian astronaut twosome had gone up at the previous week-end, August 11th–12th, his chief, Martin Kalb of C.B.S., had had to stay on in Moscow to cover the story. The party, according to the itinerary just read out, was due to leave Ulan Bator on the first leg of its travels in the hinterland on the following Monday, August 20th. Kalb was due to fly in from Moscow and Irkutsk on Wednesday the 22nd. On that day the party was due to return to a place called Arvaiki-heere, after a brief stay in the Gobi Desert. Tiffin explained the problem while Lotchin gave him an increasingly beady eye.

Lotchin: “I do not think Mr. Kalf will be permitted to arrive in Ulan Bator.”

Tiffin: “Oh, yes. He has been given special clearance by the Mongolian Embassy in Moscow.”

Lotchin: “Maybe. But when he here, what he do then?”

Tiffin: “Take a taxi or hire a car to join us in Arvaiki-heere.”

Lotchin (pouncing): “Mr. Kalf know we in Arvaiki-heere on Wednesday night?”

Tiffin: "Oh, yes."

Lotchin: "But *how he know dis?*"

Tiffin: "He has seen a provisional copy of the itinerary, of course."

Much muttering between Lotchin and Sharhu followed this revelation, while Jimmy attempted to relieve the tension by waving another cyclostyled copy of the itinerary, which he had forehandedly brought with him.

Finally Lotchin decided to accept the position and to change the subject. "Very well. Now we all go to see film show."

It was getting late and it had been a long day. The films, technically admirable I understand, were made by East Germans, but merely gave glimpses of all the things which we would be seeing for ourselves during the next few days, so that it seemed to be a senseless redundancy. I had a ready-made excuse for not going. The day before, while stepping off a small boat on the shores of Lake Baikal, near Irkutsk, I had misjudged the backward bob of the boat and missed my footing, wrenching my knee agonisingly between the quay and the ship's side. I was still in considerable pain and hobbling laboriously. Even Lotchin had noticed that. He accepted my crying off with moderately good grace, and then turned to whip in the others. They left, grumbling but resigned. I went up to my room and had another look at Lenin's rear view from the window.

### CHAPTER THREE

## *The Land of Genghis Khan*

THE Mongolian People's Republic, formerly known as Outer Mongolia, is a dry plateau, 1,470 miles long from east to west, and 780 miles from north to south, with an average elevation of about 5,500 feet, but with some of its mountains in the Altai region in the west rising to 15,000 feet. The total area is 600,000 square miles, some ten times bigger than England and Wales, and the population just under one million, of whom an estimated 180,000 live in Ulan Bator.

A good deal of the country lies within the boundaries of the Gobi Desert, which extends to the Chinese frontier in the south; but the term 'desert' is probably misleading to Western readers. The totally arid and sandy wastes which the word may suggest, exist, so far as the Gobi is concerned, only in very small pockets, and much of the rest is covered with thin vegetation.

At the last count there were between 27,000,000 and 28,000,000 head of cattle in the country. Traditionally content for many centuries with their milk derivatives and plentiful meat, the Mongolians experimented very little with crop cultivation, and as recently as 1940 only 64,000 acres were under cultivation in the whole country. The problem here is the extreme dryness of the climate, and it has proved possible to grow crops with anything like success only in certain northern districts; although near the former site of Karakorum, Genghis Khan's 13th century capital, Chinese labour brigades have

completed a good deal of valuable irrigation projects, using the waters of the Orkhon River, and an immense state farm flourishes there.

The most significant political fact about the M.P.R. is that at present it exists as an independent nation only because of the enormously accelerated growth in power of its two neighbours—by whom it is totally enclosed—Russia and China. For centuries those two countries have been confronting each other in central Asia and often encroaching on each other's territories. Most of the encroaching was carried out during the last century by Tsarist Russia, when China was going through one of her weakest periods. Russian expansionism often included the present Chinese province of Sinkiang among its goals, and as recently as 1946 Soviet troops invaded Sinkiang.

Manchuria, occupied by the Russians in their hostilities with Japan at the end of World War Two, was not finally evacuated by Russian forces until 1955, when the Soviet Army withdrew its garrison from Port Arthur, and left Manchuria to China.

As for Outer Mongolia, the country was a Russian satellite in all except name for many years, and often hovered on the point of formal annexation by Moscow. But with the swift rise of Chinese power, after Mao Tse-tung had defeated Chiang Kai-shek and Communism had swept the Chinese mainland in 1949, both sides had to move with increasing wariness and the governments of Moscow and Peking realised that an independent Mongolia existing as a 'buffer', a 'link', or a 'cushion'—the words are equally popular as used by the experts to define Mongolia's status—between them was the best diplomatic solution.

The great if relatively brief period of Mongolian performance in the world arena until now was during the days of its extraordinary Khans, of whom the best known

is Genghis (1162-1227). He could neither read nor write; his real name was Temujin; and nobody has any inkling as to his burying place. His first big military success came when he was over 40, but then followed a series of victories opening the way for invasions of north China, what is now central and southern Asiatic Russia, India and the Caucasus.

One of Genghis' grandsons, Batu Khan, advanced right across western Russia, Poland, Hungary and Moravia, and his scouting parties crossed the Danube and reached the Adriatic. Another grandson, Hulagu, conquered Persia, took Baghdad and invaded Egypt. A third grandson, Kublai Khan (1216-94), conquered southern China, Tartary, Tibet and Burma. He was an enlightened man who encouraged literature, established Buddhism as Mongolia's state religion, and lived in a magnificence which drew respectful comment from Marco Polo. Giving up Karakorum in favour of Peking as his capital, Kublai established the Yuan dynasty which ruled over China for the next century.

But this flare-up of mobile military virtuosity—achieved if not absent-mindedly, then at least with no master plan of conquest behind it or the desire for permanent world domination—was ended in 1368, when the Chinese drove out the Yuan dynasty. And in 1380 there came a retribution as complete as that which befell Carthage at the hands of the Romans, when a Chinese army invaded Mongolia and blotted out Karakorum. Mongolia sank back into oblivion. By 1691 the Manchus were ruling China, and Mongolia as well; sealed off from nearly all contact with the world, the Mongols remained part of the Chinese Empire until the revolution of 1911.

About 1905, Russian influence in central Asia was recognised as paramount north of the 43rd parallel, including Outer Mongolia, but from 1908 onwards the Chinese

did their best to get a better grip on Outer Mongolia by means of disguised colonisation through peasant farmers, and the sending in of shrewd traders and shopkeepers of the kind which have made their mark all over the world.

In Mongolia, however, the Chinese encountered a novel problem, which hampered their efforts at infiltration. Chinese trading communities like to establish themselves in solid and permanent enclaves abroad, the 'Chinatowns' known all over the world.

But in Mongolia they found themselves trying to deal with a nation of wanderers, none of whom would stay in any one place for long. Their only quasi-permanent colony in Mongolia was at the dismal tent city of Urga, and there they became unpopular. They were regarded as hard bargainers and came in for the sort of resentment and mistrust which has attended all races adept at trade and finance anywhere and at any epoch.

At the end of 1911 Outer Mongolia proclaimed its independence, but in 1913 the Mongols, not encountering as much Russian sympathy as they had counted on, again accepted Chinese suzerainty. In 1915 Outer Mongolian "autonomy within the Chinese Empire" was reaffirmed, but Russia secured such wide trading and other rights in the country that Outer Mongolia had become to all intents and purposes a Russian protectorate.

Then in 1917 came the Russian revolution, and confused fighting in Outer Mongolia between Chinese and Soviet-Russian forces, a People's Revolutionary Party of Mongolia, which had been started in 1918, and anti-Bolshevik White Russian units commanded by a Baltic Russian named Baron Ungern Sternberg. By 1921 Russian (Bolshevik) troops had occupied Urga (Ulan Bator).

Russia was determined to see that Outer Mongolia should never be in hands which would make it a potential threat to the Trans-Siberian Railway and hence the whole

Russian position in the Far East. In 1924 a Mongolian constitution, modelled closely on that of the Soviet Union, proclaimed the formation of the Mongolian People's Republic, and Outer Mongolia thus became the second oldest Communist nation and government in the world.

But then again Outer Mongolia returned to a position of isolation. Once more, while nominally under Chinese suzerainty, she was in reality a Russian satellite. During the next 30 years Moscow several times toyed with the idea of annexing the M.P.R. In 1936 a Russian-Mongolian defensive alliance was proclaimed. The lamaseries were closed down or razed, and steps taken to reduce drastically the intake of young monks, mainly by way of educational measures.

A great new land cultivation programme was started, with a goal of a quarter of a million acres, but it failed miserably.

In 1945, just after the end of the last war, a Russian-supervised plebiscite was held in Mongolia to determine the country's future. It resulted in a nearly 100 per cent. vote for independence. In January 1946 China, then still under Chiang's Nationalist rule, formally recognised Mongolian independence.

About 1955, Russia, while still maintaining considerable influence in the M.P.R., started unostentatiously giving the Mongolians far more independence in fact as well as name, and the threat of Russian annexation passed, at least for the time being. In 1961 the entry into the United Nations by the M.P.R. was for them an event of great significance. At last they were properly a nation again. After 800 years they had escaped once more from silence, neglect and the indifference of the world.

A stir of nationalistic pride ran through Ulan Bator, although it is questionable whether the event was as

keenly appreciated in the *gers*. But membership of U.N. is only the first step in the minds of the Mongolians. Now should follow, so they think, diplomatic relations with the great powers of the West. After that, full Mongolian participation in all the various other international bodies and projects which should be her right.

The second important political fact concerning the contemporary M.P.R. is that she is a minority nation in a racial Mongolia which is split into three. Her population of a million is overshadowed by more than 1,400,000 people of like stock who live just over the Chinese border to the south in Inner Mongolia. And immediately over the Russian border to the north-west is the Buriat Mongol Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic with its own population of 260,000 Buriat Mongols (in addition to other races). The Buriat Mongols have a separate history from the Outer Mongolians and a different sort of life. It is the close ties between the Outer and Inner Mongolians that may lead to interesting developments in the future.

For although stability seems at last to have been achieved on the Russo-Chinese frontier, and the setting up of the M.P.R.—with something like genuine independence for the first time in nearly a thousand years—brings, perhaps, an additional factor of stability there, it must not be forgotten that neither the U.S.S.R. nor the Chinese People's Republic is given to regarding any situation or accommodation as permanent.

And so China is keeping a strong card handy, the card of irredentism. Her embassy is one of the most imposing buildings to be seen in the new Ulan Bator, and while Russian influence stands highest in the M.P.R. at present, Chinese diplomacy is tireless. There are something like 13,000 Chinese permanently resident in the M.P.R., descendants of the merchants and others who emigrated in the last forty years. And there are



the labour brigades, variously estimated to number 40,000 to 60,000 men, who live in special compounds of their own. They sign on for five-year periods, have a spartan sex life (few bring wives, and relations with the Mongolian women seem of the sparsest), all wear the familiar 'blue ant' overalls, are unpopular with the Mongols because they ship back to hungry relatives in China large quantities of anything tasty arriving from the Western satellite countries almost as soon as the consignments have reached the shops, and perform prodigies of hard work to help get the Mongolian economy moving.

Any withdrawal of this work force would be a great blow to Mongolia. The country is embarrassingly short of manpower, and the presence of the Chinese workers will be essential for a long time. The Russians are prodigal with their technicians and experts, but, with the Russians' own labour problems, the sending of a big Russian labouring group to take the place of the Chinese would be out of the question. The Chinese have accomplished a great deal already. They set up the vitally important irrigation complex, using the waters of the River Orkhon, near what used to be Karakorum, and they built the power station nearby.

They put up many of the new buildings, including the textile factory in Ulan Bator which contains mostly British machinery. They have built what paved roads there are, and they have set up hundreds of miles of telephone lines, one branch of which serves as a link in the Moscow-Peking service. The telephone poles for these new lines are anchored in a manner which I do not recollect seeing in any other country that I have visited. Instead of being put directly into the ground, the poles stand between closely gripping stilts, made sometimes of heavy steel, sometimes of concrete, with the bottom ends of the poles about six feet above the

surface of the ground. The reason, I suppose, is that it affords more solid resistance for the poles against the fierce winds which ravage the steppes in winter. These telephone poles provide one of the more persistent and indeed dramatic reminders of Mongolia's emergence into the 20th century. One may have been travelling for hours in a bouncing jeep without seeing another living thing, man or beast, except for a few birds. Then suddenly there appears in this immense, monotonous wilderness of grass and distant mountain one of these lines of telephone poles, strung across the void.

The Chinese know that in fostering the desire for union between their Inner Mongolia and the M.P.R. they must move with the utmost discretion. They have been pushing their own people into Inner Mongolia for a long time, and the Chinese there now outnumber the Mongolians by five to one. Irredentism could easily prove to be a two-edged sword. But the quiet campaign is there. Propaganda is pushed by the Chinese in such ways as the publication of handsomely prepared colour magazines concerning life in Inner Mongolia, which are freely available in Ulan Bator. In spite of the presence of so many able-bodied and vigorous young Chinese within the M.P.R., the elaborate Chinese Embassy, and the vital help which China is giving Mongolia, I could find no sign that China is planning at present to challenge Russian influence in the country in any overt way. The Mongolians remain antipathetic to China. This is partly due to historic memories, partly to a sort of instinctive distrust and fear of the huge southern neighbour. On the other hand the Mongolians seem to take to the Russians and to get on well with them. Most Mongolians now speak Russian (it is taught in the schools) and many of their outstanding professional men have completed their education in

Moscow or Leningrad. The Mongolian police and army wear Russian uniforms, and the army uses Russian as well as Czech weapons. A great deal of the new equipment and fixtures of the new Mongolia are Russian-provided. The Chinese may have built the textile factory in Ulan Bator, and the British provided the machinery—but it was the Russians who drew up the plans for the building. The Mongolian broadcasting system and the Mongolian press are both patterned closely on the Russian model. The Chinese may provide the sweat and brawn out on the roadways under the sun—but it is the Russians who send in their own technical élite. And these technicians are closely interesting themselves in the considerable mineral wealth of Mongolia. There is uranium in the north-west; gold in the Hangai and Hinteï mountains; rock crystal; turquoises; topazes; garnets; tourmalines; fluorite; silver; copper; iron; manganese; marble; granite; quartz; asbestos, and gypsum. Important coal mines have been worked for years not far from Ulan Bator, and near the Chinese border oil has been struck in the Gobi Desert. As a Mongolian official put it to me: "The Russians are co-operating fully in developing the mineral wealth of our country, oil included."

Russian capital is invested in a considerable range of Mongolian enterprises, from motor transport to hay-cutting stations. Certain Russian factories within the U.S.S.R.—i.e. gramophone records, chinaware—are completely integrated with the Mongolian economy, and their entire output is earmarked for Ulan Bator. Russia is busy trying to develop various sorts of food supplies which until recently were a novelty for the Mongolians, including rabbits, pigs, and chickens. Nearly all Mongolian engineers and machinists are Russian-trained; few of their technicians think of going to Peking.

Several times, when Behrens or someone else asked a sharp question about "foreign aid", it was noticeable that Russia was always referred to warmly, while China was either not mentioned at all, or only grudgingly after further verbal prodding.

Apart from such handsome gifts to the M.P.R. as the national airline, which the Russians organised and whose pilots she trained, and the railway, fully equipped with the latest diesel locomotives (it is a most useful money-maker for the Mongolians), the Soviet Union has, since policy was changed and it was decided in Moscow to recognise Mongolia as properly independent, handled the Mongolian situation with tact. Her presence is encountered at every turn, but it is rarely there in a manner calculated to upset or antagonise. The Russians have succeeded brilliantly in creating an 'image' of comradely helpfulness, untinged by self-seeking. Russian imperialist aggression is a thing of the past—"fit only for the museums", to quote one of their favourite phrases. With military considerations in regard to the M.P.R. forever banished as "unthinkable", save in the defensive sense, all that remains is all-out assistance to the fledgling nation in the fields of industry, culture and art. The only reservation to this was a report by one of my colleagues on the tour, who told me (he is a fluent Russian speaker) that some of the Russians, both men and women, whom he had seen about Ulan Bator had struck him as supercilious in their dealings with the Mongolians.

Why the Mongolians should find themselves in closer natural harmony with the Russians than the Chinese, apart from historical memories, is a matter for speculation. Mongolian has nothing in common with the Russian language, but during the long period when Buddhism was the dominant force in the country there were ties with China, both culturally and artistically,

as well as with Tibet, Japan, Korea, Burma and India.

As far as I know, none of the Russian technicians who visit Mongolia—and there were about 1,000 when I was there in August, 1962—are drawn from representatives of the various Asiatic Soviet Socialist Republics, although there may be a few.

In 1960, the latest year for which trade figures are available, Mongolia imported from China 88,759,000 roubles' (£35,222,000) worth of goods, of which 68,000,000 roubles (£27,000,000) were for consumer goods. From Russia in the same year she imported 235,552,000 roubles' (£93,473,000) worth, with 132,000,000 roubles (£52,381,000) spent on machinery.

Mongolian exports in that year were: to China, 130,000,000 roubles' worth (£51,587,000), and to Russia, 219,000,000 roubles' worth (£86,905,000).

Mongolian exports include timber, leather, salt, cattle, wool, fur, butter, soda, pigments, phosphorus, marble, lime and chalk. Finished goods include carpets, mirrors and household fittings, the last a curious term which somehow fails to carry conviction. A brickworks in Ulan Bator is reported as turning out a million bricks yearly. The Mongolian "food industry" is reported as providing "between 40 and 50 per cent. of all industrial output". It is a pity from the Mongolian point of view that many of their natural resources are duplicated in Russia. Thus the Russians can have small use for Mongolian timber—it includes cedar, pine, larch, spruce, fir, and birch—nor for silver fox, ermine, marten or sable, all of which abound in parts of the M.P.R.

There is no doubt that the Mongolians have never 'had it so good' nor that, given a long period of world peace, they will continue to prosper. They are in a splendid position, now that their two huge neighbours have apparently decided to leave the intervening midget alone.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Bogdos and Lamas*

**B**REAKFAST on that first morning in Mongolia bore a marked similarity to the dinner of the night before, and lunch turned out to be more of the same. Although the food, caviare included, was almost unbearably copious, it did not vary greatly in content from meal to meal. There was always a huge array of cold side dishes scattered about, followed by at least two hot entrées, the plates overcrowded with heaped helpings, much of the meat rather strong for my taste, and the rest often reeking of garlic. Meals usually ended with ornate and over-rich cakes. The cheese, in a country so generously supplied with milkable livestock, was strangely unpalatable and I barely touched it. When we succeeded in persuading Batoch, the little head waiter, that quantity was not the idea where we were concerned, he started serving fried eggs, which, with the soups, were about the most pleasant offerings. I found that caviare, Russian mineral water and three or four glasses of the hot tea formed an acceptable breakfast.

The first item of De Plan consisted of a tour of Ulan Bator by private bus. The honeymoon period with Lotchin, although already considerably dented by his bearing of the night before, was still more or less on, and The Leader and others were still doing their best to woo him into a pleasant mood. The Germans, among whom Arnot's cameraman assistant, the 28-year-old Gernot Anderle, was outstandingly good-humoured and

cheerful, were a bit flippant about The Leader's title and there were occasional cries of "Heil, Obergruppenfuhrer!" and even a stiff-armed Nazi salute to greet him now and again, but Reinbacher took it in good part.

Reinbacher told me later that he had never wanted to be a doctor, but had yielded to the insistence of his father, who was also one and who had built up a flourishing practice. Reinbacher said he had found it irksome to have to attend to the needs of the sick on days when he wasn't feeling like it. It was not being in charge of his own professional life that really got him down; one day forty or fifty people might be clamouring for his services, the next day no one. "I wanted to practise just when I felt like it," he said, "and of course that was impossible." So on his father's death Reinbacher gratefully sold his practice and became a photographer. He said he loved it, and he certainly seemed a happy and lively man. He spends even more time away from home than I do—I average about six months of the year abroad, but Reinbacher said that in his case it was more like nine. His marriage he described as idyllically happy. His wife runs a scent shop in West Germany, a successful business with five employees under her. "Ve see each ozzer not often, but zen zis is an advantage because alzo ve are merried it is like to be loffers. Ve vill not haf children as zis vould spoil all."

The bus chuffed about Ulan Bator, the driver taking care, of course, to keep to those parts of it which were the most creditable—new government buildings, the State printing works and what-not. Halts were made from time to time to enable the photographers to take their pictures and they eagerly jumped from the bus and disappeared in all directions, to the manifest and growing distress of Mr. Lotchin.

To say that Mr. Lotchin's English was sketchy is to be

kind to him. At the Palace of the Khans I tried taking a verbatim note of his informative comments for a few minutes. The palace was built in 1905 at the reputed price of three and a half tons of silver. It started out as a lamaistic shrine and is surrounded by a circle of replicas of itself. Today it serves as a museum but is still known as The Temple of Generous Mercy. Its gaudy green roof is uptilted at the corners in the Chinese fashion, looking like a tennis racquet that has been left out on a wet lawn by mistake all night. The curator or guide was a youngish man in a shabby suit and dirty collar, whose hair resembled a dismantled brush. He needed a shave, had pimples but sported a cosmonaut tie-pin.

Here is Lotchin giving a fill-in: "Dees ees Winter Palace of Bogdo Number Eight. Small garden where he get some animals, for example monkeys, such kind of things. He rule from 1873 to 1924. In Mongolia altogether eight persons who rule; first two were Mongolian nation, six successors were being Tibetan. Dees is some kind of gate. Protection from wind, put up 1893. When de big palace was built de title was given by de man in Tibet. Dese two gates are for certain military people who guarded Bogdo. Here place for flags—dey were flags for church. Here are historical heroes. From that story is painted de heroes. Dees is de story all connected up—folk story. He take de victory over hees enemy, some kind of hero, and also of course some kind of opera. Long, long story. Please to ask de writers and intellectuals when see them. Dees painted 23 times."

An interpolation from Jimmy: "When are we seeing the writers and intellectuals?"

Lotchin: "Of course."

Inside the doorway are four vast and garishly-painted goddesses, two on each side, making laughable faces at the passerby. One of them is poised on one leg, with



scores of little heads strung about her, their expressions those of faces in a French comic weekly.

Lotchin: "Ha! ha! Look under de foot." We obediently look under the foot of another of the goddesses. She appears to be stamping the life out of a group of monkeys and Negroes who squirm in abject remonstrance.

Lotchin: "In order to make him goodwill, make such offerings. Otherwise he will be bad man. Dees ees man who made as cooker,\* as servant. Dees ees life of that time—everything is here."

Jimmy: "Was he married?"

Lotchin: "Who?"

Jimmy: "Why, the Bogdo."

Lotchin: "Yes, of course."

Jimmy: "Any children?"

Lotchin: "No. He was the head of the State . . . Dees was temple where five days ceremony. Dees ees for incense or something like that. When de people died, bad people goed to de darkness. Dees all means become rich—good peoples. Here ees wooden statue, made of wood."

Jimmy (aside): "Where do you suppose they actually lived?"

Myrland (earnestly): "Why, Jim, that's a mighty interesting question. Why don't you go ahead and ask it?"

Jimmy: "Mr. Lotchin, where did Bogdo live?"

Lotchin: "Presently."

Lotchin continues: "Dees war god. Dat is killer. Something like. Dees riches, property, something like." We pass a monstrous figure, glaring from a jaundiced face, with a giant mouse in one hand and his foot placed on a tortoise. "Dees are some kind of musical instruments, made end 17th century. Dees made iworryary. Divination piece—most useful. Dees tapestry, made by Mongolian national woman. Dees seems master of world,

something like. He always eat heart of his enemies—always. Hees eyes very strong and so he finds the enemies like that, you now. In this is keeping warm so de family had many children, something like that.” (Points towards midriff of statue of the goddess of fertility.) “When de Bogdo was still in living, many faces, many friends.”

We had been told that no photography of any kind was allowed within the temples. Suddenly a commotion, as none other than our leader, Dr. Reinbacher, is seen kneeling in a dark corner behind a handy altar and fumbling with his moving picture camera. (Professionally Reinbacher is a still photographer only, but he also took thousands of feet of moving picture film for the benefit of his wife.)

Lotchin (accusingly): “Doctor Leader! What ees dees? I ’ave tell you—no peectures!”

Reinbacher (highly indignant): “But I’m not taking pictures. I am an honourable man all the time. I merely change my roll of films here in this helpfully dark corner behind the peeautiful altar.”

Lotchin (sceptically): “I see.”

He continues: “Dees ees statue of Fifth Bogdo. Here are Bogdo’s priceful silk tapestries, very expensive.”

Jimmy advances to inspect the tapestries.

The Professor: “Don’t touch!”

Jimmy: “I wasn’t touching, only looking.”

The Professor: “Well, be careful.”

Lotchin: “In summer Bogdo used dese dresses, or maybe in springtime.” We pause in front of a case filled with magnificent dresses made of gold brocade.

Lotchin: “Dese used by queen—very expensive.”

The Professor: “The Bogdo was of course a theocrat.”

Jimmy: “Are all of these materials the original?”

Lotchin: “Of course. Nowadays we cannot fabricate such things.”

We trudge round the Bogdo's private museum, which among other things houses a mouldy stuffed giraffe. The giraffe is too tall for the room and it has proved necessary to cut a hole in the ceiling to accommodate its head. The effect must be very odd for anyone entering the room above. In another museum we visited, a similar problem had been overcome in regard to a stuffed wolf which was too big for its glass case. An extra storey, so to speak, had been added, and the wolf's head stared out from inside a small glass conning tower atop the main case.

As we paced through small rooms thronged with collapsing vultures, cross-eyed eagles, meek ducks, a spavined stork or two, stuffed monkeys, the giraffe, some lynxes, a lion and a collection of foxes hanging in a row as in a furrier's shop, Lotchin explained helpfully: "Bogdo had private zoo."

But I think that probably my favourite Lotchin remark was at another temple-turned-museum, which has above its main doorway a horrific frieze, showing men who have been castrated and their eyes gouged out, hanging head downwards covered in blood and with frightful expressions of agony on their faces. Said Lotchin: "Dese bad things. Men most uncomfortable."

We spent some time at the new Ulan Bator version of the GUM department store in Moscow, a five-storey affair without lifts, which seems well patronised and stays open until 9 p.m. on most evenings. The goods on offer contained a high percentage of things from the other satellite countries, including Rumanian wine, Bulgarian jam, East German biscuits and Russian toilet articles. We also stayed a long time at a half-completed housing development, and here Lotchin became very fretful indeed. The photographers vanished round the corner and John Tiffin told me afterwards that they got some remarkable pictures of elderly women staggering about

bearing enormous blocks of cement in their arms. Lotchin instructed the driver to punch the horn in an attempt to summon the wanderers. I had stayed in the bus, partly because, as far as I am concerned, looking at housing developments in Communist countries ranks alongside visiting collective farms as a thundering bore, and partly because my knee was still very painful. I took stock of the others beside Lotchin, Gold Tooth and myself who were in the bus, for a quiet build-up of other people accompanying our party had already begun. So far there were only two: a grey-faced little Mongolian who took almost as many pictures during the following fortnight as did Jimmy and Reinbacher, and a man we came to know as 'Horrible'. Horrible was explained as being of the party "in order to help the photographers", and once or twice he half-heartedly abetted the illusion by himself carrying a cheap-looking camera slung about his meagre shoulders—but never used. He was in fact a plainclothes police informer. His skin was very dark—he was one of the near-Negro Mongols in tint—and he had a long, lugubrious face and darting, shifting eyes. He also had the trick, common to secret agents and plainclothes men all over the world, of suddenly glancing behind him, or bending backwards to look sharply past a knot of people to his right or left. This knack, which in itself is enough of a give-away in most countries, is usually reinforced, so that there shall be no missing them, by the wearing of what is virtually a uniform into the bargain.

In Mongolia the beret was the badge of the plainclothes cop, and Horrible wore his at all times—a beaten-up, dingy thing it was too. He was a man born to be what he was, furtive, shabby, cheerless, dreary, a hanger-about in alleyways, a keyhole peeper, a trailer, a nasty piece of work. The only person who ever saw fit to talk to him was Lotchin.

When the photographers had reassembled we went on to the City Museum for an instructive hour or so. It is a strange little retreat, oddly engaging in a pathetic way, with its scratch collection of lop-sided pictures and crude drawings, ill-executed portraits of heroes, large-scale models of the Ulan Bator of the future, propaganda and general bric-à-brac, including a machine-gun which was said to be the gift of North Viet Nam, and which was identified by one of our party as of the same type used by the Communist forces in Laos. A feature of nearly all Mongolian museums is a collection of coloured daubs showing the various sorts of torture which were inflicted on the Mongols by their Manchu overlords during the period of Manchu occupation—branding, lashing, the stocks, the slowly-carried-out hanging and what-not. Naturally no word is ever said against the Chinese although Mongolian antipathy towards them is still strong; the rebukes are invariably reserved for "the Manchus".

During our tour of the museum I idly asked Lotchin whether the Mongolians had supported the Russians against the Germans in battle during World War Two. He scowled at me with his face full of suspicion. "Where have you heard dis room?" he demanded.

"This what?" I asked.

"Who has been telling you dis bad room?"

Finally we made out the word to be 'rumour'. I tried to explain that nobody had told it to me, as a rumour or anything else, but that I was just asking out of curiosity. He pursed his lips and turned angrily away.

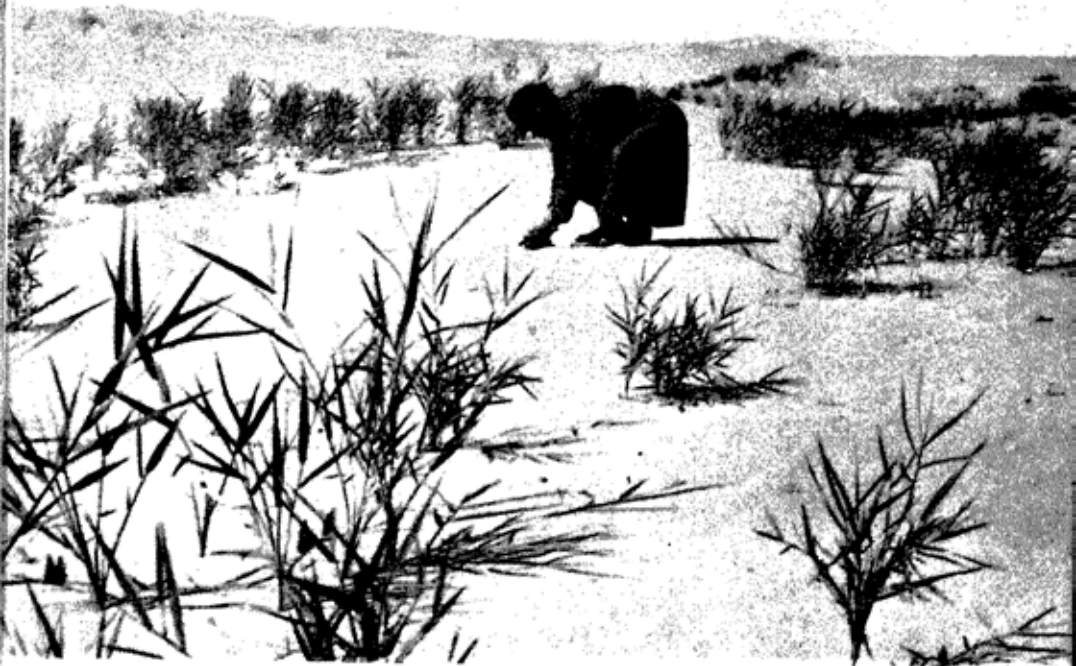
The truth is that no Mongolian units joined the Russians against the Germans (Mr. Ivor Montagu reports that they sent some ponies and messages of encouragement), but that they did see brief action in the few days during which Russia was fighting an already-beaten Japan in Manchuria.

Back at the hotel we encountered two rather bedraggled-looking European ladies, who turned out to be respectively members of the Finnish and Swiss legations in Peking and who had, in what must surely rank high in the annals of diplomatic devotion to duty, elected to spend their holidays in Mongolia rather than seeking the easily available fleshpots of Hong Kong. After making their way north to Ulan Bator on the train from Peking they had received a nasty shock on being informed, with characteristic Mongolian officiousness, that they could not go back the way they had come but must instead continue on to Moscow, several thousand miles from their posts. No reason was given for this preposterous piece of nonsense. In the end I believe they were able to straighten things out and go south again, but it took a great deal of argument.

The next day I overheard a remark with which I warmly sympathised, although I am afraid it received no encouraging reply. I am not sure where the two ladies had their meals. We never saw them at meal times, and it is possible that they had them in a smaller V.I.P. diner. As I was passing through the hotel lobby, the two lady diplomatists were standing despondently talking to the Mongolian woman who was Lotchin's vis-à-vis for the benefit of female tourists. And as I passed, one of them asked sadly, "But is there *no* other restaurant in the whole of Ulan Bator where we could go, just this once for a change?"

They were, they told me, feeling particularly frustrated because, apart from a single visit to a collective farm about 60 miles from the capital, they had been forbidden all travel and were forced to spend their whole week's stay amid the limited attractions of Ulan Bator.

Our Germans had a number of conversations with some of the East Germans staying at the hotel. One of



*Del-clad guide in the Gobi Desert*



*Traffic policeman in Russian-style uniform in Ulan Bator's main street*



*Bird dance by wrestler*





*Bird dance by author*



*Mongolian children are expert riders by the time they are five years old*

*Lotchin, the unfriendly guide*

*Batoch, the friendly waiter*



them made the startling revelation that although he hated it in Mongolia, he hoped to stay on for some time because the food was so much more plentiful than it was back in Dresden, and he was managing to put on a bit of weight. In this he was a contrast to our party, most of whom lost poundage during the two weeks.

It was at lunchtime on the first day that we began to realise just how closely we were to be kept under surveillance. Jimmy slipped out by himself for a short stroll in the final few minutes before lunch was served, and took some innocuous photographs, including shots of the Foreign Office, the Bulgarian Consulate and a couple of statues. This was instantly reported to Lotchin, presumably by Horrible, and taken very badly. Coming on top of the undisciplined dispersal of the photographers at the building site in the morning, it put Lotchin in sulky mood. No sooner had lunch ended than he ordered The Leader to announce that in future we must always keep together and on no account go off by ourselves anywhere. There was grumbling at this, but Lotchin was adamant. Moreover, he went on, he would on no account agree to the several requests which had been transmitted to him by The Leader, asking that we might be allowed to walk back to the hotel after the various sight-seeing visits. We would go everywhere by bus, and that was that.

"What about a visit to the market?" asked someone.

"What market?" countered Lotchin.

"The famous open-air market, sort of bazaar," explained Arnot. Lotchin scowled anew. The thing he was most intent upon was ensuring that the photographers did not take pictures which might depict Mongolia as 'backward'. Obviously he would not relish the notion of the market being photographed—the GUM department store was supposed to fill all our needs in that respect.

"It's very picturesque, we hear," added Myrland in propitiating manner. The wrong approach, alas. I remembered, during a visit to Tashkent in 1954, being taken by an Intourist guide to see the Uzbeks' open-air market. When I expressed enthusiasm about it, the guide reacted very much in the Lotchin manner. "It will soon be done away with and a good thing too," he had said. "These are old-fashioned and backward affairs which have outlived their usefulness. We will build a fine new shop complex instead."

Now Lotchin said blandly, "There is no market in Ulan Bator." We all knew him to be lying but there was nothing to be done about it.

"So—now for the State Museum," added Lotchin briskly. "We leave in six minutes."

This was to be the four-hour job, and I was having none of that. With a sadistic leer at the victims, resentfully making for the bus, I hobbled up to my room to do some thinking and note-taking. Arthur Myrland announced stoutly that nothing would induce him to spend four hours in a museum. "I'm very fond of your British Museum," he said, "and I go there nearly every time I'm in London—but I wouldn't dream of spending any four hours there. One is about enough; I shall break away half-way through and walk back."

In fact he did not, but was forced to go through with the ordeal like all the others. And ordeal it was, full-scale model of the famous dinosaur's egg and all ("The original was stolen by the Americans"). An exhausted John Tiffin told me afterwards that when, tottering on their feet, they had turned to bid the curator farewell and thank him for having taken them round, he had smiled jovially and cried, "But gentlemen, this is not the end. Two more floors to go!"

The mood was one of gloom at supper that night.

Gold Tooth, who was used as a sort of messenger boy by Lotchin, had summoned us from our rooms by saying, "You must go to suffer in ten minutes." My colleagues were tired and irritable, and there was talk of boycotting the post-supper film show which had again been arranged, this time the showing of an artless little Mongolian comedy entitled "Horseback Is All Right", in which the respective merits of horse and motorbike are compared in the midst of a triangular love story on the steppe.

Jimmy had made a further supreme effort to telephone New York, but it proved fruitless. Stung, he had written out a cable to his friend of the New York telephone company, acquainting him with the situation in such a way as to make it clear that he was getting no help from the Mongolian officials, and had shown it to Lotchin before despatch in the hope that he would be shamed into changing his attitude. Lotchin, however, read it through impassively and handed it back with a shrug. "You really want me to send this?" queried Jimmy. "If you are prepared to pay for it," said Lotchin. "I don't understand your attitude," said Jimmy. "Just think of the publicity." "It is not possible to have telephone communications between Ulan Bator and New York. Perhaps in the future. We shall see." "But I tell you it is possible!" cried Jimmy, beside himself. "How you are knowing such a thing?" "Because New York has already successfully called Ulan Bator two or three times." "And what 'as 'appened?" "They could only get someone speaking Mongolian, and so it was no good." "Ah, so it was waste of time." "But don't you see that if I called *them*, I would be speaking English and it wouldn't be a waste of time then." "No, it is not possible."

We had all also undergone rather a trying time when changing our money. 'Mister Bank Man' had put in an

appearance in the little exchange room off the hotel lobby and, watched by a sleepy-looking group of Mongolian women—who turned out to be ‘bank ladies’—started laboriously ministering to our needs. The process was necessarily a slow one as Mister Bank Man had apparently never set eyes on any foreign currency before. Armed with a huge picture book showing the currencies of the world, which he kept close to his elbow, he conducted his business with the greatest circumspection. The picture book was not perhaps as useful to him as he may have thought, for while changing a couple of £10 sterling traveller’s cheques for me, I noticed that he kept shooting confirmatory glances at the book—which at that page was showing the reproduction of an American five-dollar bill.

In most parts of the world a traveller’s cheque usually commands a small premium over paper cash—but not in Mongolia. On the contrary, the traveller’s cheques were cashed at a sharp discount, while the paper dollars and sterling fetched a better rate. The rates were not good in any event, and there was an element of farce about the purely arbitrary figure at which the Mongolians had decided to change our money. Mongolian paper tughriks rate zero on the world exchanges and are worthless. I wonder who dreamed up the figure which they finally decided on where we were concerned. With the wretched rate they allowed us, it was not only the vodka that came high.

The photographers were getting restless about obtaining some shots of *gers*, Arnot was keen on filming some yaks. “The yak that grunts as it walks,” he said, “must have that. Yaks are about all any of the teevee-viewers back home know of Mongolia.” “Ah,” I said. “*Bos grunniens*.” Across the table The Professor, who had been struggling with an enormous helping of what looked like

inferior sauerkraut, pricked up his ears. "Bravo," he said to me in surprised approval of my ability to tab the 'grunting ox' with its scientific name.

The Professor had a knack, a holdover doubtless from the lecture room, of pointing briefly at anyone starting to address him, as if he were benevolently giving him the right to put a question to the dais. As an expert on deserts, the Gobi was to provide The Professor with his finest hour; but he was pretty solid on nearly everything that came up. At times, as we made our way through a Buddhist temple or paused to examine some artifact in a museum, The Professor would more or less take over the limping commentary from Lotchin, much to the latter's annoyance. And indeed he clearly knew far more about the subject than either Lotchin or the various guides would ever know. One would catch stray snatches of The Professor's *obiter dicta*—"These rocks are evidently of igneous formation." "What is your evidence for making that statement?" "I am unable to accompany you all the way on that proposition, which I regard as resting on a shaky foundation indeed." "Pray continue—you interest me." "May I continue?" "Thank you—you have made your point." "May I add in parenthesis . . ." "The rocks on your right were probably laid down in the post-Hercynian period, that is to say, within the last 100 million years or so. These are neither new nor old mountains, geologically speaking, but somewhere between the two. You must, of course, realise that I am no geologist." And once, at a moment of tension, when Jimmy was pouring out his woes, The Professor rebuked him with, "I have not the slightest objection to your lodging a complaint if you feel one to be justified, so long as you do not lodge it with me."

Sunday morning was devoted to a visit to the Buddhist Gandantehchinling Monastery in Ulan Bator. It is the

largest in the country, contains a richly varied assortment—in one of its rooms priceless old manuscripts lay near a picture of the Russian cosmonaut Gagarin—and is about the last going concern of Buddhism in Mongolia.

Buddhism, which for centuries dominated and ran the whole country, is now only a meaningless remnant. Where until as recently as forty years ago there were 100,000 or more monks, today there are not much more than 100 left, an ageing and largely decrepit lot. Under the constitution of the M.P.R., the government "guarantees freedom of belief". It may guarantee it—but it is doubtful if anyone in authority encourages it.

There was a fair crowd of laymen standing about in the monastery precincts to watch and listen to the goings-on, but it was difficult to determine if they were of the faithful or were simply curious bystanders. The cameras and other apparatus carried by our party also caught their passing attention, but one of the striking things throughout the entire visit was the lack of interest, in all parts of the country, which we as individuals or as a group seemed to cause among the members of the Mongolian public. They are a stolid lot at the best of times and they appeared to accept the presence of the group of Westerners as routine. They may have thought us to be Russians or East Germans, but certainly they never seemed in the least intrigued by us. John Tiffin had armed himself with a polaroid camera, and it might be thought that this would surely cause happy comment, when those we met found that they were handed photographs of themselves within a few seconds of their having been taken. Not so. Once or twice polite interest was expressed, but in general the photographs were cursorily glanced at and then laid aside, or even proffered back again to John.

After its initial drive, Buddhism became a completely



dead hand laid on Mongolia. It has been called "a frightful curse", and the priesthood described as entirely parasitic. The lamas—and the second son of nearly every family in the land became one—were unalterably reactionary, opposed to every new idea or invention, from the radio to new drugs and medicines; and, encouraged by their example, inertia and backwardness were for long the twin badges of the country. This suited the purpose of China, which was Mongolia's overlord until 1921, and which found in the feudal lamaseries just the system to keep the people quiet. The lamas also played their part in helping the venereal diseases, which for generations were endemic in Mongolia, to remain in a flourishing state. For on the night before her wedding every bride was made to visit the local lamasery, where she was 'tried' by the inmates. As a result of this variant of the *droit de seigneur*, V.D. was almost certain to be present in every marriage and to infect the offspring. Today the medical authorities say that V.D. has virtually been stamped out—but then add that there are still nineteen full-time V.D. clinics in the country, which suggests that there may be some way yet to go.

However much the Mongolians may have wished to modernise and industrialise their country in the old days, there was little that they could do, since nearly all their activities and output were devoted to keeping the lamas in style. The interior of a Mongolian Buddhist monastery is full of sound and action. It is not only the elderly priests themselves, hard at it as they squat in double lines facing one another in their red robes, with drums, bells, horns, incense and singing all at full blast. As your eyes adjust to the gloom, you find the whole place fairly writhing with hanging gongs, glaring masks—some of enormous weight—huge statues of various gods and demons accomplishing the most improbable acrobatics,

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scores of smaller brass Buddhas, carvings, murals, sculptures—a fantasy of objects crammed into every foot of available space on altar, wall and ledge, the whole thing resembling inspection day before the auctioning off of the effects of a determined but rather indiscriminate collector of Oriental *objets d'art*.

The singing was spirited, although whether only temporarily so for the benefit of the Western visitors, or whether they keep it at that degree of energy when unobserved, I do not know. Some of the really old lamas were piping and quavering reedily while they fumbled with the book of words set out at each place. But there were some quite lusty voices in the middle registers and one remarkable bass of great timbre and carrying power, who acted more or less as anchor man to the choir. I enjoyed the way in which they would all suddenly stop singing for something like half a bar, then strike up again with a strangely drawn-out wheezing effect, very much like a gramophone which has inadvertently started while the needle is half-way along the sound track of a record.

The photographers were revelling in this, popping in and out among the demons, lying on the floor to get a good shot of a singing lama from below, letting off flash-lights which illumined the drifting incense with dramatic effect and taking their places alongside the ardently singing lamas to get telling close-ups. For their part, I think the old men rather enjoyed the hurly-burly. Their role is nowadays merely as a showpiece for the tourist, a sort of Yeomen of the Guard, plus bells and horns. Any sort of religious connotation has long since disappeared—the whole thing is the sort of 'quaint' item which most countries fostering tourist industries nowadays keep as an occasional counterpoint to the general picture of forward-looking and industrial dynamism. They tootled on their 'burees', the 18-foot long horns which are

supported on the floor by special rests, wristily hammered out an occasional rhythm on their whirling hand drums, and smote the gongs with gusto. It was noticeable that several of them kept glancing at us out of the corners of their eyes—they obviously wanted to put on a good show. And the final detail which suggested show business rather than monastery was that with their cropped heads they suggested so many berobed but crewcut performers.

After the uproar and a visit to the monastery library, we were led across to a *ger* for refreshment. I asked if one should refer to our chief host as the abbot, but on enquiry I was told that nowadays his correct title is "president of the lamasery". The *ger's* interior was splendid, the red-and-gold motif of the lamas' robes (there were about half a dozen of the most senior present) being boldly repeated in the upper ribbing of the tent, its felt walls, and the altar, whose gay hangings, vessels and brass figurines shone in the light of the butter-oil lamps.

We sat at low tables decorated with matching red lacquer and set in a circle round the tent's interior perimeter. A rich carpet with a zig-zag design picked out in blue on crimson covered the floor. The hospitality was stupendous. There awaited us a circular mound of bread and rolls, roughly a foot high, and a foot in diameter. At the top of this, within the crater formed by the topmost layer, stood an armful of boiled paper-wrapped sweets. Jammed on to every part of the rest of the table—reminding me in its busy and crowded effect of the altars we had been looking at earlier—was a quantity of offerings including bowls of *koumiss*, salami, cucumbers, cold mutton, tea, bottles of lemonade and bits of the hard-packed camel's milk cheese. From time to time, during the hour or more we spent there, lay servitors, wearing masks over their mouths of the type

used by surgeons and nurses during an operation, came round with enormous helpings of the artichoke-shaped dumplings containing meatballs; chopped lamb with jelly noodles; and bowls of what seemed to be a far-out version of chop suey.

I had noticed, as we made the rounds of the lamasery, that we were closely followed about by a tall thin Mongolian in a grey suit, who wore a number of campaign ribbons on his jacket. He had entered the *ger* with us, and now sat by himself, chain smoking and keeping a sharp eye on all that passed. Finally I asked who he was, since he seemed rather out of things. After a pause for muted consultation, it was explained, laughably, that he was "the lamasery president's chauffeur".

The masked servants produced bottles of Mongolian vodka and came along, carefully filling the thimble-sized metal goblets which poked up from amid the thicket on the tables. The Professor, who had taken up a strategically valuable position, next to Lotchin and as close to 'The President' as he could get, was peppering the latter with weighty questions. The answers came through, more or less, but slowly, and it was not easy to assess how accurate they were. That is always the nagging drawback of dealing through an interpreter, especially in a Communist country, when no opportunity is normally lost to inject propaganda into the conversation and to put things in the best possible light as far as the host country is concerned. Very rarely—I lit on one in East Germany this year—you meet someone who is not only an outstandingly good interpreter but quick and intelligent into the bargain. Lotchin was among the lower echelons where interpreting was concerned, and there was constant doubt in my mind as to how much of what he said was truthful.

Thus, when talking to the head of a hospital on one occasion, we asked about the incidence of polio in Mongolia. The answer came: "There is none." This was a remarkable statement and the doctor was questioned closely as to why he thought this happy state of affairs should be. He said, reasonably enough, that the absence of crowded cities and the fact that a small population lived for the most part in huge open spaces was probably the answer. We were just going on to the next topic when the doctor and Lotchin had a quick conference together in low tones, and then Lotchin amended: "Polio is not completely unknown in Mongolia. There is some."

Towards the end of the hour and a half in the lamasery 'President's' *ger* everyone was starting to sweat copiously and the conversational ball, even under The Professor's skilled and knowledgeable blows, had just about ceased to bounce. None sweated more than the lamas in their robes, and our own rate of perspiration was more than sufficient to keep pace with the thimblefuls of vodka we kept being offered. The ladies from the Swiss and Finnish legations in Peking, accompanied by their woman guide, had joined us, and were being urged to attack the mass of viands on their table with raillery and gallantry by the nearest lama.

At last protocol was satisfied and we were able to rise and leave, pausing only to take part in a group photograph with the 'President' and his men.

It is extraordinary how close exposure to the sight of too much food can completely kill the appetite. At the *ger*, I had eaten exactly three small pieces of salami and one boiled sweet. I do not think the others accounted for much more. And yet when we got back to the hotel and were told by Gold Tooth that lunch was all ready, the notion struck us as repulsive, and we made only a token appearance at table.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Spectator Sports*

LOOK at two of Mongolia's national sports was scheduled for our second afternoon in Ulan Bator. Tempers were, unfortunately, strained. Gathering time for the expedition had been announced as 14 hours, but here it was 14.10 and Jimmy was missing. The Leader strode back and forth. "Vere is Herr Macrae?" he demanded. All looked blank. "I tell you completely," said The Leader, "zat if zis goes on I am repidly losing any more my loff and my vill to be ze leader." All looked sympathetic.

Jimmy suddenly came trotting out of the hotel, wearing a natty dark blue sports shirt, a pair of lemon-tinted sports slacks and an American version of tennis or gymn shoes known as 'P. J. Flyers'. Seeing us all awaiting him glumly, he bravely essayed a light laugh. The Professor took him aside. Later as we made our way into the sports arena, The Professor sidled up to me. "I had a word with our friend Macrae," he vouchsafed, "and pointed out to him the extreme impropriety of keeping the party waiting. He was suitably penitent. I think that there will be no need for anyone else to take him to task. He has learned his lesson."

Inside the arena there was one of the curiously undemonstrative Mongolian audiences sitting waiting for our arrival and for the fun, such as it was, to begin.

The seats were occupied by the same proportion of

Mongolians as one saw on the streets, many in *dels*, emerald bloomers, puce-coloured housecoats and high boots, the minority in an approximation of Western dress. They sat patiently, seeming not to expect anything very thrilling, content just to be there for the time being. They reminded me, in their apathy and their willingness to endure, of a crowd which has been summoned haphazardly as possible film extras. There is just the chance of being taken on for a week or two, at a daily pittance. It's the luck of the game. Otherwise you will be sent home with your fare paid.

We were led to seats near the *tribune d'honneur*, which was occupied by a party of Russians. The two diplomatic ladies from Peking were not far away. They looked weary but still full of fight. I wondered how Mrs. Bulstrode of Britain, reputedly the first European woman ever to visit Mongolia (in 1913), managed. There was some cackling over the loud-speaker, and then the wrestling was on.

As far as I am concerned, the best part of Mongolian wrestling is the entrance of the contestants. First the two *zazsuls*, or seconds, pace forward. These are usually elderly men who have clearly seen life, and may well have been wrestlers themselves in their day. They look pretty bored and seem to take their duties in off-hand style. They stand around, in *dels* and pointed caps, and their main activity, apart from crying the Mongolian equivalent of "Break!" at intervals, is to receive the wrestler's headgear before the match and put it back on his head afterwards. But the advance of the wrestlers is in the manner of a bird, a mythical Indian bird, which was supposed to infuse an athlete with great power and endurance. The wrestlers wear little; a sort of brief but gaily-coloured bolero jacket, tiny trunks, little more than a slightly ambitious jock strap; and high boots. Thus

accoutred, they come teetering along, their chests pushed forward, their arms outstretched, their hands thrust upwards from their wrists and held outwards; and making their progress in a series of short prancing hops, with the high-booted feet being quickly kicked upwards behind them after each mincing step.

The wrestlers vary from skinny children, aged apparently about six, to huge, brawny and knowledgeable thugs. Some of the adults are really big, by European standards. Some are small wiry athletes who, in a Western boxing ring, would rate probably as junior bantamweights. Their skins are as varied as the faces on Ulan Bator's streets suggest: sometimes bronze or dark brown, sometimes jaundice yellow or dough white.

But as the two adversaries come along, side by side, towards their respective seconds, the sight of them hopping forward in their stylised birdlike manner, their heads on one side, their lips curled in ingratiating smiles, transforms what might be a hugely comic business into a pleasantly fascinating and even hypnotic scene.

At the end of the preliminary hop the wrestler pauses and straddles his legs wide apart. Then he slaps his bare thighs loudly, once on the top surface and then underneath, as though to demonstrate that he is in good condition. Then, his legs still straddled, he gives a grotesque single hop forward, landing heavily on flat feet. Next the wrestlers go hopping up to their seconds, who are still looking pretty bored, and encircle them in a fawning sort of way. The seconds remove the caps of their men and the contest is on. Watched by a tableful of alert officials, the two men bend low, eye one another portentously and do some shifting around.

After a tentative feel at each other's shoulder straps or the edge of one another's bikinis—again very much like the feinting and exploratory blows which take place in



the first round of a boxing match—one of them gets going. The favourite ploys are a clutch at the back of the opponent's thighs, a quick kick to attempt to trip him, a combined lift-and-throw, or a grab to gain a fatal grip on the clothing of the adversary. All this takes place to the accompaniment of routine shouts from the seconds and almost total silence from the audience.

Many of the falls which I saw were rather messy affairs, and if I had been judging the contest I would not have been at all sure which of the men hit the carpet first. In general it seemed that the man who finished more or less on top, even if parts of his anatomy, such as elbows or knees, were touching the carpet, was the winner. The crowd was by no means excited, and the only time they seemed at all gratified was when a contest finished quickly.

After the fall, both men spring up, and the loser, invariably bearing a most sportsmanlike smile, advances to the winner, bends his head and quietly walks round him, while the victor makes a token one-armed gesture of embracing the conquered man. Then, while the loser hurries off-stage, the winner, again mimicking a hopping bird, comes towards the V.I.P.s, his smile more ingratiating than ever. I found this part of the proceedings embarrassing, because I thought that the winners should have received a brisk round of applause. But after the first few contests, the scanty hand-clapping died away almost entirely, the Russians in the *tribune d'honneur* looked bored and the winners were left to do their victory bird act in almost total silence. Trying to keep the winners in countenance, I found myself smiling back at them—sometimes with my own head sympathetically on one side.

After an hour or so of this, Lotchin indicated that it was time to be off for the next treat. We accordingly

climbed into the bus and were trundled out for a couple of miles along the road towards the airport, then we wallowed across a deep ditch and mounted the side of a long grassy hill, where archery was in progress.

I ought to say here that nothing during our stay in Mongolia struck any of us as being even remotely spontaneous. All was ham-handedly stage-managed and contrived. All was laid on. We came to look on ourselves as a group of captive tourists, being led into a series of elaborate ambushes.

The archery bit consisted of a row of elderly chaps in *dels*, lined up literally shoulder to shoulder, drawing their beads on a target about 320 feet away. The target was formed by a row of flimsy bricks, about a foot high. Around the target stood a half-dozen or so scorers, also wearing *dels* and high-crowned felt homburgs. Their situation, which, at first sight, seemed one of extreme danger, turned out to be not at all parlous, because the arrowheads of the contestants were rendered harmless by thick coatings of rubber.

The proceedings took place to a curious threnody. Alongside the archers who were actually shooting squatted a row of reservists. These kept up a lugubrious singsong, intended to celebrate some notable piece of marksmanship. The droning and wailing would have seemed more appropriate to mourn the total eclipse of their team.

But the umpires-cum-scorers, hovering about the target, were also providing a musical accompaniment. Almost as soon as the archer had twanged his bow, the umpires at the receiving end seemed to know what the result was likely to be. They started up a most miserable wailing, and then, as the arrow came to the ground, or hit the bricks, they would wave their arms about in a code of signals to indicate the result.

The droning singsong from both the shooting row and the umpires' end was still going on when the Russians, who had been at the wrestling, turned up. They looked very severe, sat sternly in the shade of a tent, and then after a short stay climbed into their ancient Zis cars and made off back to Ulan Bator. There also appeared the two diplomatic ladies from Peking. I approached the Swiss and suggested that if she could whistle up an apple we might stage an engaging repeat of the William Tell epic on the hills of Mongolia. She smiled wanly.

Charles Arnot was busy. "This is Charles P. Arnot," he authoritatively informed his tape-recorder, "A.B.C. Five seconds." Pause of five seconds. "This is Charles P. Arnot, A.B.C., on the windy steppe outside the city of Ulan Bator, in the Mongolian People's Republic. Archery is one of Mongolia's age-old sports, and I am standing near a group of Mongolia's famed archers, who are shooting their arrows with deadly precision, plucking them from their gay sashes before fitting them to the bowstring and pulling back the string with a leather thumb guard on their right hand. The left sleeve is tightly bandaged to the elbow, to keep it clear. The bow requires an extremely strong pull. It starts from the top and bottom as a reverse arc, then bulges abruptly outwards, with the centre curved slightly back inwards. The scores are being written down by a judge born in the Year of the Monkey, while the song greeting a fine shot must, if the ceremonial be strictly followed, be begun by a person born in the Year of the Dragon." Charles then crawled towards the archers and held his microphone near one of the bows, to capture the twang.

I was always fascinated to watch Charles at work. As he addressed himself to his recorder his whole personality underwent a change. His voice dropped several registers in tone—I could almost see it travelling downwards from

his chest, where it normally resided, to his stomach, whence it issued for the nonce in gorgeous pear-shaped periods. His face changed too. Its expression became immensely grave, that of a statesman about to make a pronouncement of the greatest moment. As he spoke he wagged his head incessantly from side to side, as though to help cadence and rhythm.

Where the wonders of photography seemed not to excite the Mongolians at all, Charles Arnot often attracted an attentive audience with his tape-recorder. The sight of a man apparently standing talking to himself with great emphasis and portentousness usually produced a silent group of onlookers; and if Charles ran a playback of some background sound effect which the Mongolians had just heard themselves—the wailing of baby camels, perhaps—they were much tickled.

We were asked if any of our group would like to try his hand at archery, although it was indicated that a visiting tyro could scarcely hope to emulate the veterans whom we were seeing in action. Undaunted, Gernot Anderle stepped forward and seized a bow. He was shown how to draw it, the bow being first held horizontally, and then, as the string comes back, being moved in an arc to reach the vertical position at the same moment as the string is stretched to the full. Gernot's first shot was off target, his second just short, and his third bang on, scattering the bricks in all directions, while the tic-tac men went crazy with approval and the wailing soared in ecstasy. Another of the Germans, I think Arnsperger, then took a turn and promptly did the same as Gernot, hitting the target with a fine shot at the third attempt. Although this may have been beginner's luck, my impression was that the mystique and difficulty of archery may well be overrated.

We were supposed, according to De Plan, to meet

some prominent Mongolian journalists after "suffer" that night, but Lotchin said the meeting had been put off "because it was Sunday", an alleged reason which left us puzzled. It was that evening that there was first ominous talk about what was going to happen to the film taken by our party. A smiling Lotchin announced that according to "Mongolian rules and regulations" no undeveloped film, whether moving picture or stills, could leave the country without having first been developed in Ulan Bator. The Leader immediately protested. Reinbacher pointed out, accurately enough, that Ulan Bator was totally devoid of any means of developing colour film, and that if any attempt were made to do so it would simply mean that all the film would be ruined. Even the black and white material, given the profusion and great rate at which it was being shot, would take many weeks to develop in Mongolian hands and would lose much of its topicality, assuming it survived intact. The argument raged for an hour or more, with Lotchin remaining non-committal, and finally broke off with the threat still there. This was clearly part of the general policy of trying to ensure that nothing should leave the country which could be regarded as detrimental to Mongolia or as depicting the people as 'backward', but since Lotchin, Horrible, or one of their numerous henchmen were invariably at the elbows of the photographers and so knew very well what was being photographed, it was simply a harassing tactic.

We were all gloomy by this time, and the photographers especially so. It would be a very serious matter for all of them if their films were seized, spoilt or delayed, but particularly so for the two television network men, whose companies had spent a great deal of money, including fares for two men in each case.

This blackmailing threat was one more unpleasant factor in a tour that had already lost most of its charm. Charles Arnot had coined the phrase "captive tourists", and that was exactly what we were. We were under open arrest, forbidden to go anywhere without escort, forbidden to walk in the streets of Ulan Bator, forbidden to move except as a group, unable to meet any Mongolians save those carefully handpicked and rehearsed by the authorities. Any attempt at deviation from De Plan was regarded as serious, and Lotchin several times asked after the state of my knee with a sarcastic air. It had become evident that the whole approach of the Tourist Agency was fundamentally different from that of any tourist agency we had hitherto encountered, in that the tour was being run to meet the convenience and wishes of the officials instead of the tourists. This was one instance of the customer never being right. Lotchin was fond of referring to us as "the guests" of Mongolia, thus implying that we were under some sort of obligation to do as we were told while in the country; but I pointed out to him pretty sharply on one occasion that we were paying guests, to the tune of £650 each, and that we felt strongly that this ought to give us a say in what took place. I had a couple of brisk brushes with Lotchin early on, after which he and Horrible regarded me askance, although both were mystified and non-plussed that I carried no camera. There were jests among my colleagues that if the worst happened and they did eventually insist on seizing all film when we left, I would be given an intensive brain-washing to ensure that no notion of 'backwardness' should be borne out of Mongolia among my impressions.

Charles Arnot and I wanted to interview the Prime Minister, Umjagin Tsedenbal, and we drew up a list of four written questions which were to be transmitted by

Lotchin. Charles read them aloud to the party and they met with general approval, even The Professor bestowing a kindly accolade on their content. Jimmy, balked of his telephone call to New York, was redoubling his requests for a talk with Damdinsuren, and The Professor too wished to meet the distinguished novelist. Both meetings, if they took place at all, would have to wait, we were told.

Jimmy revealed that he had sent Damdinsurin a gift parcel of 35 books, published by his firm, the year before. "Was he pleased?" I asked. "I don't know," said Jimmy. "He never replied."

On Monday—August 20th—we were taken out to the airfield by bus en route to Arvaikiheere, 250 miles to the south-west. The big helicopter was still there, under its covers, but the cooking party beneath it had gone. We had already taken our seats in the Ilyushin-14, Mongol Air Lines No. 103, and the gold-toothed stewardess was making the rounds with the sweets when we received the order to de-plane. Although the weather was good in Ulan Bator—it was one of the most pleasant days, meteorologically speaking, of the whole trip, with not too hot sunshine, heady air, and one of the blue skies after which the Mongols like to name their land—the report from Arvaikiheere was of sharp thunderstorms and heavy rain. We sat about in the sun and presently a few of us went upstairs to try to get a drink in the buffet. This was not part of De Plan, but I do not think Lotchin noticed us go. The woman running the terminal building made a firm attempt to persuade us to take refuge in the V.I.P. room, a creditable imitation of the sort of thing you find all over the U.S.S.R., blue plush curtains, lace doilies, white covers on the chairs, potted plants and what-not, but we brushed her aside and entered the public restaurant. It was pretty squalid and so were most of

those inside it, including a ragged woman with a half-naked child. The Mongolians do not go in for the niceties when they eat; the approved method is to put the mouth down as close to the food as possible and just shovel the provender in. Gold Tooth joined us to help with the interpretation and, after ascertaining from the worn-looking woman behind the bar that there was none of the hair-oil beer or even mineral water available, we settled for a round of vodka and Chinese lemonade. As we sat down at a table to drink this, Gunther Wichman disappeared. The instant he touched his chair it flew to pieces beneath him and he crashed full length to the floor. The chair was reduced to a few pieces of firewood. It was an extraordinary scene, like a stage effect in which the furniture is elaborately prepared beforehand to crumple easily during a fight or other piece of 'business'. The chair might have been a booby trap, and I cannot think that it could have accommodated anyone, even the half-naked child, without collapsing. The rest of us could scarcely stop laughing, but the Mongolians in the restaurant paid not the slightest attention to the untoward incident. They continued shovelling home the food or staring into space. Never a smile, never an exclamation.

At last it was decided to return from the airport to Ulan Bator for lunch, and start off again in the afternoon. We arrived in Arvaikiheere four or five hours late, to find the weather completely restored. Just after we had got out of the aircraft (on the flight Jimmy had given one of his lipsticks to the stewardess, who seemed delighted), Jimmy went up to Lotchin and asked for permission to take a photograph of the stewardess in her blue *del*, standing in the doorway of the aircraft at the top of the ramp. He explained that he knew about the regulations forbidding the taking of photographs at air-



fields, but perhaps just this once, since it was only of a stewardess and would show nothing of the surroundings. Lotchin firmly shook his head. "But Justice Douglas took the picture," expostulated Jimmy, holding up his well-thumbed copy of the *National Geographic Magazine*. To which, with gratuitous rudeness, Lotchin replied, "But you're not Douglas," and turned away.

By now many of the party had begun to suffer from what are vulgarly known as 'the trots'. Through long and miserable experience of what may be expected in most countries in the non-temperate zones, I always start taking an anti-diarrhoea preparation for at least a week before leaving the U.K., and keep up heavy and regular dosage all the time I am away. But Mongolia had already succeeded in defeating my hitherto reliable specific, and most of our digestive systems were in a bad way. I am extremely queasy about inadequate or rudimentary sanitary conditions and go to great lengths to try to avoid them. During travels in the U.S.S.R. some years ago, I hit on a useful means of coping with the more noisome latrines; I always have a couple of pocket inhalers with me, one in use and one in reserve, and when driven at last to face the miseries of what one of my Russian Intourist guides once referred to as "a certain little place", I would stick an inhaler into each nostril and, thus caparisoned, sally forth. Even the most stolid Russians I met in the corridors while thus insulated used to give me a double-take as I went by.

With the sheer malice of circumstance it invariably seems that the onset of 'the trots' coincides with the worst of the lavatories. So it was at Arvaikiheere. We found ourselves victims of a dreadful tug-of-war between the urge to evacuate and the revulsion caused by what John Tiffin described as "the twin sentry boxes" standing in the dirty yard at the back of the local hostel. The

arrangements there were loathsome, and even with my two inhalers in play, it took a lot of determination.

In addition to his lipsticks, lighters and ballpoints, Jimmy had come stocked with a considerable medicine chest, and this proved to contain an anti-diarrhoea preparation of such extreme potency that it could be obtained in the U.S.A. only by doctor's prescription and had to be carefully measured out with an eye-dropper. Jimmy was generosity itself with his specific, and at one time was measuring out his drops for half a dozen or more of us. It worked splendidly as far as my own stomach was concerned, but it quickly turned out that I shall never become an opium addict. Jimmy's medicine contained a good deal of opium and the side effects were startling; my mouth dried up so completely that I could scarcely talk; my heart started to pound; I became dizzy and then felt sick. So the grisly dilemma still posed itself: accept the 'sentry boxes', or submit to treatment that practically laid me out?

At the hostel they tried the 'doubling up' suggestion again, but I flatly refused and after an argument got a room to myself. It was not much of a room, but then none of them were. There were chess boards and chessmen in all the rooms, and the tables were covered with elaborate tasselled lace cloths, almost exactly like the ones that used to be found at seaside boarding houses in Britain forty years ago. The light glared unshielded from a bulb on the ceiling, and there was a cheap little radio set in the corner. All the Mongols staying in the place kept their own radios on constantly.

As soon as our bags were set down, Lotchin and Gold Tooth were rounding us up for the scheduled visit to a co-operative farm. The delay had put De Plan for the day in grave danger of disruption, which would never do.

The entrance to the hostel and the first-floor landing

## SPECTATOR SPORTS

where we had our rooms swarmed with plainclothes police. Glum and unpleasant, they stood about in their berets, staring at us. Once when John Tiffin stepped outside for a breath of air, a face slowly slid round the corner, in best Third Man style, eyed him with intense suspicion, then slid back again. I cannot think what secrets they may have to conceal in Arvaikiheere, the capital of South Hangay Province; but the security there was the toughest and most ostentatious of the trip. Horrible was in luck, though—for once he had someone to talk to.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Down on the farm*

THE hour-long drive in a string of Russian-built jeeps to the co-operative farm gave us a hint of the travel horrors to come—although it was not only brief, but the terrain was mild compared to some that lay in wait. The reader should bear in mind that nearly everywhere in Mongolia there are no roads at all.

I have often cursed roads in Jugoslavia, pre-war Albania and other parts of the Balkans; but compared with Mongolia, south-east Europe enjoys princely roadways. In Mongolia, jeeps and buses have almost always to follow sketchy camel tracks. Often our bus would career across a grassy steppe, where there was not even a track to follow. There were rocks to be negotiated; precipitous little fall-aways into the beds of dried-up streams; frightful ruts; hillocks, and deceptive spots which looked firm but concealed treacherous marsh. The luckless passengers undergo a prolonged and taxing physical ordeal. One hangs on persistently to whatever may offer some sort of stability as the vehicle sways and bounds, bumps, slithers, drags, gets stuck on a rock, or comes a teeth-jarring crash into a minor ravine. It is as though one were at sea during a typhoon—and the sea was made of cast iron.

For hours on end the vehicle forges on, rarely able to average much over 25 miles an hour. When a recognisable track is visible, it keeps splitting itself, amoeba

## DOWN ON THE FARM

like, into two, three and sometimes four at points where marshy conditions have caused some earlier traveller to get stuck, churn up the ground in extricating his jeep, and thus make a detour advisable for the man coming after him.

We kept begging the drivers of our jeeps not to follow one another too closely as this meant travelling in a relentless cloud of dust. They would dutifully drop back for a while, but then start gaining on the next man again until back we would be in the dust cloud. The reason is that breakdowns and accidents are so frequent that when several vehicles are moving in convoy the drivers like to keep close together—certainly within eyesight of one another—in case of mishap. Sometimes when we moved into the dust stream of the jeep ahead and were about to launch into fresh expostulations with our driver, he would seem to remember just in time that we did not approve, and would swing the jeep off the track and into the huge stretches of grass alongside. Although this had the effect of temporarily getting us out of the dust, the grass, while giving the illusion of a smooth surface beneath, in fact concealed ground that was just as hard and uneven as the wretched track from which we had just escaped.

At the co-operative farm I saw the first examples of a curious Mongolian detail: statues of animals. Since they have thousands of live horses at this farm, I should not have thought it necessary to have a statue of one as well, but there it was. And there to help greet us was our friend Batoch, the little head-waiter, his dinner jacket superbly incongruous on the steppe, his aplomb unshaken. A group of dignitaries made us welcome and led us solemnly into a *ger*. I have to bend almost as far down as a Mongolian wrestler even to get into a *ger*, as the doors are small, though vividly decorated.

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Inside we seated ourselves at the low tables, confronted by the usual colossal feast. This one turned out to be the most enjoyable meal I had in a *ger*; they served an excellent cold saddle of lamb. It was at this meal too that we were offered the colourless, odourless, saké-like drink, so that we fared well.

Whenever, as then, we sat talking to a Mongolian spokesman, whether he was on a co-operative or a state farm, was a hospital doctor, ran a sanatorium, or had been produced as an economics expert, I was always uneasily aware of a sense of unreality hovering over the encounter. This was partly due to misgivings concerning the validity of Lotchin's translation; partly to a long-standing mistrust of statistics—and statistics came in floods—which are uncheckable. But above all, it never seemed to me that the man to whom we were talking even remotely filled the bill or looked the part.

I was haunted by the feeling that these were commissars from Ulan Bator, specially rushed here, there and everywhere to keep the party happy; perhaps on the same bus as Batoch, the little waiter. The feeling that the whole thing was a conjuring trick was heightened by their always being referred to in such terms as "the president" or the "vice-president". In the same way that it struck me as ludicrous that you should have the "president of the lamasery", so it seemed similarly ludicrous to encounter "the president of the collective farm". Discounting the fact that Mongolians do not look like Europeans and thus may not be so easily classified by appearance, I never saw any high official who looked like anything but a government bureaucrat, and I think that is what nearly all of them were. Later in the tour I asked whether the head of a state farm was in fact a farmer. The answer: "The president has had agronomical training."

## DOWN ON THE FARM

Anyhow, there I would sit, gagging on the *koumiss*, eating an occasional sweet and downing another fatty slice of cold lamb, while the agronomist sprayed me with statistics. The hectares I could get along with fairly well, but I was lost once I found myself amid the poods and the centners.

One statistic stayed with me: Mongolia has 393 veterinarians, an awesome thought when you consider that they have to look after more than 27 million head of cattle between them. They must be kept busy, although we were assured that foot-and-mouth disease, like polio, is nowadays unknown in the M.P.R.

I didn't take notes that night at the co-operative farm, but I did the next week at the state farm, near the site of Karakorum. Here is some of what I was told: the state farm covered 495,000 acres and was organised in 1956, to specialise both in livestock and agriculture. Their 'plan' last year had been overfulfilled by more than 130 per cent. ("more than . . ." is a favourite phrase in Mongolia when dealing with figures). The farm is about 4,500 feet above sea level and the climate is "very changeable" (sleet was falling as we talked). 61,950 acres were sown to wheat at that time, and 41,990 acres were lying fallow.

There was "much mechanisation", and they had 100 tractors on the place and 70 combines, the gift of the U.S.S.R. During the six years of its existence the farm had given the state 12,000 to 18,000 tons of grain every year. The Chinese-constructed irrigation system had been completed in 1960. The main canal, leading from the Orkhon River, was 225 miles long. They would be proud to show me the Chinese-built power station. (They did.) Their livestock numbered some 60,000: 70 per cent. were sheep, 15 per cent. horses, 10 per cent. cows, and 5 per cent. camels. They also had 10,000 hens and 3,000 rabbits.

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The farm's income was between 1,500,000 tughriks and 2,000,000 tughriks a year. Nominally, since the tughrik is 'tied' to the pre-1961 rouble, this works out at over £134,000 on paper. There is a repair shop for their machinery; a car pool containing 20 lorries; a population of 7,000, about 60 per cent. of whom are in the labour force tending livestock, and 30 per cent. in agriculture. There are also 2,000 children and old people.

There is a flour mill with a capacity of 12,000 lbs. a year; 90 per cent. of the grain produced is wheat; there are two schools, a hospital, and three veterinarians. Women work in the labour force between the ages of 18 and 55; for men the ages are 18 to 60.

Q: Is membership of the labour force compulsory?

A: We have no unemployment, if that is what you mean.

Q: How many Party members are there on the farm?

A: 200.

Everyone receives political indoctrination talks twice a week. One talk deals with the international situation. The other is one of a series of "specialised lectures".

Q: Do you have activist groups as in the U.S.S.R.

A: No. We have instead Brigades of Socialist Labour. Fifteen brigades of these are now in training.

Q: What about newspapers?

A: We receive them from Ulan Bator twice a week.

Q: Are they compulsory reading?

A: Of course not. But the whole farm population orders them anyway.

Russian, Chinese and "other languages" are taught in the farm schools. There are 500 radio loudspeakers fed by a central reception point which takes the programmes



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from Ulan Bator. Each worker duly filling his or her 'task' gets one month's paid holiday a year.

Q: What is the average income of the farm workers?

A: About 300 tughriks a month on the state farm, compared with 450 or more on the co-operative farms. About £27 compared with £40.

Q: Why the difference?

A: Because on the state farm the worker labours for only a fixed number of hours (8 a day), while on the co-operative farm there is no fixed limit and overtime is freely worked.

Q: What are the respective national totals for state and co-operative farms?

A: There are 30 state farms and more than 300 co-operatives.

Ten Russian technicians were in residence at the farm, to drive and service the tractors. They were expected to stay on for at least another year in order to train Mongolians for the job. Ten Chinese specialists were also in residence to maintain the power station. 1,000 Chinese were formerly engaged in building the power stations and the farm "paid all their wages".

The Chinese were paid in tughriks but were allowed (unlike temporary visitors such as ourselves) to exchange their accumulated tughriks for Chinese currency on leaving for home at the end of their contracts. Their families in China were also paid an allowance by the Chinese authorities. They never marry Mongols and they "bring no women with them".

Until 1947, 99 per cent. of all cattle in Mongolia was still privately owned. Only about 0.2 per cent. of the cattle was in the hands of the co-operatives, and 0.8 per cent. was owned by the state farms. Ten years later 75 per cent. was still privately owned, with 22 per cent.

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owned by the co-operatives. In 1959 the government announced compulsory ownership of all cattle, and all herdsmen were made to join co-operatives without compensation.

From the co-operative farm *ger* we were driven a short distance to see the horses. This was a lively, pleasant and dashing scene. A great number of the screaming, snorting, neighing, whinnying beasts had been rounded up on the steppe and were careering, kicking and nuzzling in a confused *mêlée*. I know nothing of horses, but I could see that they were much smaller than the sort of thing one normally encounters in England, ponies in fact. They seemed to be of every conceivable colour and marking, and their manes and tails were uncommonly bushy. When they galloped the tails streamed out behind in engaging fashion: I was told that shoes are unnecessary and never used for Mongolian horses, but that they are so tough that their small feet come to no harm.

The ponies were full of nervous energy and highly-strung excitement. Every now and then one of them would cut away from the main throng and go streaking across the grass as though determined to reach the furthest possible horizon. In hot pursuit, standing in his stirrups, would follow one of the *del*-clad Mongol herdsmen, clutching a fifteen-foot long birch pole with a loop (*urga*) at the end of it. The chase took place at tremendous speed, and it was a joy to watch the rider and mount, both of them sturdy, strong and skilled, acting instinctively together in perfect concert.

The sun was starting to set and a few wispy clouds floated in an otherwise deep blue sky. The huge plain lay basking in the last light as hundreds of horses and men flickered about in constant movement and uproar. I think it was the best moment for any of us since our

arrival four days earlier; so full of zest and expertise, of animal spirits in the literal sense. The chasing of the errant horse usually ended with a quick cast of pole and loop, the horse was dragged rearing to a stop, with the triumphant herdsman somehow managing to quieten and dominate his prisoner without being jerked off his own mount. This must take a great deal of strength as well as skill on the herdsman's part, for my impression was that the pole and loop are not so handy to manoeuvre and thus entail more accuracy in their use than the all-rope lariat of the American cowboy. All was not perfection. One horse in particular defied all efforts to catch him for a long time, and we saw several miscast throws and one or two of the loops broken by furiously resistant ponies.

No Mongolian horse is regarded as a pet, and none, I am happy to say, has a name. But these anonymous creatures, with their prominent, inquisitive-looking noses, invariably look in first-class condition. Seeing one which seemed relatively quiet standing by itself, I approached with soothing words, intending to stroke its muzzle. As I got within distance it whipped its hind-quarters towards me and lashed out with a two-fold kick. I just managed to nip smartly out of the way. If it had landed it would have done me no good at all—even without shoes. (On another occasion during the journey I mistakenly tried to pat a dog, only to have the brute try to bite me. After that I gave all livestock the widest possible berth.)

By this time the herdsmen were putting on group formation riding for the benefit of the photographers, who were having a field day. Tiffin was fuming. He had been about to photograph one of the horses, when Horrible, apparently thinking that Tiffin's choice was a 'backward' steed, had ordered it away and told Tiffin

to photograph another, which boasted a silver bridle, instead. Next two of the Germans accepted an invitation to have a ride. One of their mounts refused to start at all, while the other took off like a Derby winner and disappeared over the brow of a low hill at an awesome rate. It was some time before he was retrieved. Since the horseplay showed no sign of abating, The Professor and I entered a handy *ger* and toyed with a few more rounds of *koumiss* while trying to make light chit-chat with some of the locals.

One of those in the tent, which grew steadily more crowded as people came trickling in to keep us company, was the Mongolian equivalent of a babu. Nearly every community we visited had its babu type. They all wore gold-rimmed spectacles, had a special sort of hair-cut and shared a studiously mild and thoughtful manner. Since this first babu looked both intelligent and friendly, I tried to put a few questions to him, but presumably because this was not part of De Plan the questions were not translated and we failed to communicate.

On the way back to Arvaikiheere by jeep, Charles Arnot said to Arthur Myrland, sitting beside him, "By the way, those loops at the end of the herdsmen's poles were made of leather." To which Myrland gravely replied, "Thank you very much for telling me such an interesting fact."

Bouncing about on the front seat of the jeep, I reflected, not for the first time, on the remarkable extent to which the small courtesies have taken their place in American conversation. Myrland's answer, if made by an Englishman to a fellow countryman, could scarcely have been taken as anything other than malicious sarcasm and would undoubtedly have caused umbrage. But Arthur Myrland, who during the recent session with the horses had approached me several times remarking "Quite a

sight, eh? Yes, *sir—quite a sight*", was genuinely grateful for the information tendered him.

Back at the hostel (which had been built only two years earlier, but which in its dankness and general unsavouriness could have stood there for many a mouldering decade), we pushed our way through the secret police and had just reached our rooms when we were reminded that De Plan was still in operation and that the Vice-Governor of the province was even then waiting to see us. Re-entering the jeeps, we went all of fifty yards to the Vice-Governor's official residence, where we stood in a grumbling group in the street for fifteen minutes or more.

When with rising impatience someone asked Lotchin what we were waiting for, he pointed to a short man who had been standing unnoticed in the darkness all the time and introduced him as the Vice-Governor.

The functionary then led us inside, along several probing corridors and into a room where there was an immensely long table, piled high with more of the boiled sweets and also some chocolate. The Vice-Governor made a preliminary statement from his end of the table. Charles Arnot fell asleep. The Vice-Governor said something in an aside to Lotchin, which turned out to be a command to get on faster with the sweets and chocolate. Erwin Behrens asked some sharp questions. Jimmy whispered "What time is supper tonight?" to The Leader. The Leader looked pained and replied, "Zese are petty matters, not for ze Leader's attention." In his turn, Jimmy looked pained. It was by now almost 10 p.m.

Next item on the slowly unfolding agenda was to be a concert. Ever since I was taken as a small boy to a poisonous affair at the Aeolian Hall in Bond Street, I have eschewed concerts the world over and I saw little

reason to break the tradition in Arvaikiheere. Lotchin shot a suspicious look at my knee as I made my excuses, but I was driven back the fifty yards to the hostel where I had a quiet vodka.

The concert was summed up for me by a caption beneath one of the colour photographs which embellished Justice Douglas's article in the *National Geographic Magazine*: "Balancing wine cups on hands and head, folk artists perform an ageless dance of courtship"; and another which said, "Young virtuoso performs on a *morin khour*, with horse-head scroll and horsehair strings". Folk artists performing ageless dances stand almost as high on my list of horrors as a young virtuoso performing on a *morin khour*, a very distant Mongolian cousin of the guitar.

Charles Arnot got back to the hostel ahead of the field, but in a state of indignation. At half time, having tape-recorded as much of the sounds of the ageless dancing and the *morin khours* as was required, he had notified Lotchin that he was off to the hostel, which was literally round the corner from the concert hall, and would stroll back. Lotchin would not hear of it, and Charles was solemnly sent back in a jeep.

My night was much disturbed by the mournful howling of packs of dogs, a nocturnal sound effect which Arvaikiheere has in common with Baghdad; and the footsteps of fellow hostel guests going and coming between their beds and the sentry boxes in the yard.

## *Caravanserai*

NEXT morning I was up sharp at six, thankful to be getting away from the hostel, yet uneasily aware that a return visit was due later in the week. Jimmy's room was across the corridor from mine and we went down to breakfast together.

On the way down, Jimmy told me more of his theory that the best way to "communicate" with the ordinary people on the other side of the Iron Curtain was to show them that you, as well as they, love the beautiful side of nature in its various manifestations, and once that common ground was established confidence would grow and friendship too.

Before leaving Connecticut, Jimmy had apparently been outlining, for the benefit of his wife, his plans in this respect. Mrs. Macrae, evidently a practical woman, had said yes, that was all very well, but how did you *start* to establish the mutual love of nature if you did not know the language of those with whom you were trying to make contact?

"Ah," Jimmy told me he had replied, "you must use sign language to get it across."

"Such as?" enquired his wife.

"Well, if I want to refer to the stars I shall point to the skies."

"You know what they'll think you mean?" rejoined Mrs. Macrae. "They'll think you're admiring their sputniks and astronauts."

"Well, I can point to a tree—that's plain enough, isn't it?"

"Plain enough to make them think you want to relieve yourself."

"See what I'm up against?" Jimmy asked me as we took our places at the breakfast table.

A few minutes earlier there had been an unlooked-for sign of tension in our midst. Whenever one accompanies a travelling group of this sort, one soon becomes aware—a glance, a hasty retort, or, even of more significance, a silence—of certain antipathies between members of the enterprise. At the exit end of the landing where we had our rooms there stood, beyond the seat where the surly night-duty plainclothes detective bore his vigil, a large table. On this table there stood yet another chessboard on which the night staff, those who were not members of the police, were wont to try out the Botvinnick variant and the Gruson defensive forcing gambit.

Beyond the chessboard there was an empty space where stamps were sold. Mongolia is essentially a stamp-exporting country. The minor Latin American nations started the business many years ago. The idea is to keep new issues of stamps—the bigger and more garish the better—pouring off the presses, and thus provide the exchequer with a by no means negligible source of income from the stamp dealers and collectors of the world.

Until recently Mongolia and Nepal constituted the only two nations which did not belong to the International Postal Union. But Mongolia now belongs, and she participates enthusiastically in the stamp-producing business. She has enormous stamps, showing such scenes as soccer players and adult wrestlers instructing novices. There are also stamps showing female gymnasts in remarkable poses, and others depicting



white-coated veterinarians with kindly expressions, topping up hypodermics preparatory to giving a few waiting yaks some sorely-needed shots. The output of these and many other issues is torrential, but Arthur Myrland thought that he had more or less taken care of the challenge while still in Ulan Bator. On arrival in Arvaikiheere, he had been taken aback to discover that a vast philatelic field still lay before him, and he was determined to gut it.

Impatiently, he was waiting for 'The Stamp Lady' to arrive at the selling table, tantalised by the gaudy selection which lay on view.

Suddenly The Professor hove into view, making for the washroom.

"Did you get your stamps?" asked Myrland genially.

Apparently unhearing, The Professor continued on course.

"Did you get your stamps?" repeated Myrland, his voice up several decibels and not so genial. Still The Professor marched on, unresponsive, towel and soap in hand.

"Hey, there, doctor—I mean, Professor!" roared the by now aroused Myrland. "I asked you a question!" But The Professor disappeared round the corner.

Myrland leaped in pursuit and disappeared in his turn into the washroom. What transpired I do not know, but judging by a similar brush the next day, a certain resentment persisted.

We were off to the Gobi Desert, but not before another ritual visit to a museum. Closely watched by the beret-toting plainclothes men, we were ushered through an uproarious place which might well have been the joint brain-child of Ronald Searle and Heath Robinson. This was where they had the wolf with its head in the conning tower, and also some pretty striking portraits of cham-

pion camel breeders, past and present. The Manchu torture sequence was there, of course, with one or two new ones added, I seem to recall. The early morning helping of culture thus assimilated, we climbed back into our column of jeeps and headed south.

The occupants of our jeep were Charles Arnot, The Professor, John Tiffin and I. Soon we became vividly aware of the personality of our driver. His face was like a miniature Bayeux tapestry upon which the unresisted temptations and the gladly-accepted lusts of a fairly long life were depicted in loving detail. It was a face where feature and furrow merged inextricably; a face as still as an ancient carving in wood—but a carving through which glared a pair of observant but expressionless eyes.

This driver was a mute cadger of the most accomplished class. An extra sense seemed to tell him when something to his advantage was on display behind him. If Charles Arnot was offering John Tiffin a cigarette, round would come the fearsome face, directing its steady gaze in outrageously suggestive manner upon the packet of cigarettes. Apart from the feelings of natural generosity which we initially entertained towards the hard-driving basilisk, we were terrified every time he turned his back on the track and all its attendant hazards, and we ardently wanted to do anything to appease him into returning his gaze to the front.

He must have got 50 or 60 cigarettes out of my luckless companions (I am a non-smoker) on each of the two days that he accompanied us. They seemed to go in a flash, and then round would come that face again. Once Charles in desperation gave him a half packet of Philip Morris cigarettes. They didn't last long.

Because there was a double indemnity connected with his smoking—first the turn-round for the cigarette and then another for the light—Charles tried to eliminate the

second hazard by giving him a box of matches as well. These he seemed to forget, and started almost at once turning round again whenever he heard a lighter click. And he was eyeing the lighter itself so hungrily that John Tiffin was practically holding on to it with both hands towards the end.

We had a bottle of vodka with us and he was on to that very smartly. We managed to resist letting him have any of it while he was actually driving, as we feared the effects, but when the long and rough day's travel was finally done, it was agreed that he had deserved his reward. I accordingly handed him the bottle, which was still about half full. He was standing beside the jeep, and those disturbing eyes of his focused on the bottle as though he were trying to hypnotise it. I stood smilingly waiting to see him take a good stiff swig and then hand the bottle back. He did just that—and handed the bottle back empty. It was a gala performance. Basilisk was one of those citizens against whom the new laws about making drink unavailable through steep prices to the common man were aimed. Pausing only to glance round to make sure that Lotchin wasn't looking, Basilisk bent into the jeep, so that his head was concealed, placed the bottle to his leathery lips and gurgled about twice. Then he slowly straightened and returned the empty bottle with a faintly reproachful air, as though indicating that genuine swells would have let him have a bottle previously untampered with.

Drunkenness used to be a considerable problem on the steppes, and understandably so. The same reasons which produce a sizeable intake in Scandinavia, and parts of the U.S.S.R., operate also in Mongolia. Long cold winters and short grey lives, a relentless monotony of scenery and routine and work make of the million Mongols a gin salesman's dream market. In former and

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more relaxed days the sight of a herdsman plastered in the saddle was commonplace and a matter for hilarity.

Since he had probably been riding from the age of five, the herdsman was able to keep from harming himself by instinct, and was not likely to run into anything except an occasional cliff face. But these days, with vodka at five guineas a bottle, about all that is left for merry-making is the forbidding array of fermented milk drinks by courtesy of the mares, the yaks, the goats and the camels, and anyone who can get sloshed exclusively on the brews obtained from those varied udders has my admiration but certainly not my envy.

Basilisk was frighteningly quick about the non-alcoholic drinks too. It was thirsty going in the Gobi, and whereas on the first day for some reason conditions were just bearable, on the second day the craving for liquids became obsessive. Everyone was strictly rationed on that second day to a bottle of warm mineral water and a small bottle of lemonade which had to last for an eight-hour journey. The drivers got theirs along with everybody else, but Basilisk disposed of his early on with all the celerity of a chameleon tonguing a tasty housefly. After that the impassive yet accusing face kept swinging round to see what we were up to, every three minutes or so. We started taking swiftly furtive gulps of lemonade and trying unavailingly to hide the bottles behind the lapels of our jackets as we drank. But somehow Basilisk could overhear the gulping, in spite of the noise of the jeep's progress. Whenever he turned, Charles would offer him yet another cigarette in propitiation; but even while accepting the tribute, Basilisk's eye would try to determine exactly who was harbouring the last few drops of hoarded Chinese lemonade.

At one point on the homeward journey, Basilisk stopped the jeep without explanation, got out and

walked out on to the grassland. His purpose seemed obvious, so we averted our gazes and made light conversation until his return. When he did get back he bore a large nosegay of wild flowers which he had garnered. This was stowed carefully away, and we speculated in undertones—for although we thought he understood not a word of English, such was the spell he had cast on us that we no longer felt sure about anything—as to which of us might prove to be the recipient of the charming harvest. We need not have bothered. Back in Arvaikiheere, Basilisk brushed off the by now slightly wilting bouquet and bore it away, presumably for the delight of his wife, fiancée or even perchance himself.

That morning, spirits were moderately high. The Gobi sounded exciting, 'fabled' in its own way as was the Trans-Siberian Railway. We were rid of Arvaikiheere for one night at least, and there was the general feeling that once we had visited the Gobi we were in a fair way to breaking the back of the entire visit.

As we progressed with many a vicious bump and lurch on the way to Mongolia's deep south, The Professor kept up a stream of erudite comment. Little or nothing found him at a loss, and the other three of us accepted The Professor as a godsend in more ways than one, for, whenever Basilisk looked round in implied reproach, there we would all be, hanging on The Professor's lips.

The first crisis arrived soon and unexpectedly. The accompanying lorry, bearing bedding, food and crockery, suddenly sank with a forlornly groaning sound into about four feet of rich mud.

The rest of the convoy stopped in sympathy and the travellers gathered about the stricken vehicle. It was at this point that relations between Lotchin and the visitors reached a nadir from which nothing could thereafter extricate them. For led, appropriately enough, by

The Leader, the photographers sprang out and started taking picture after picture of the stricken lorry and close-ups of the nearside wheels stuck in the mud.

Lotchin became infuriated. He prowled resentfully about the swarm of photographers, who took little notice of his presence. This, for Lotchin, constituted the gravest sort of provocation, an indication that Mongolia was thought backward, in the sense that her lorries got stuck in the mud. I remember thinking that it was rather bad luck that I was inescapably identified with men, however pleasant, whose main interest was picture-taking. This is an ever-present problem during group assignments. The desires and needs of reporters and photographers are different (as, for example, on a Royal tour); but in the West these differing desires and needs are understood.

Lotchin could make no such distinction. He saw us all as a closely-knit group of picture-takers and trouble-makers. By this time the hostility between us and Lotchin was complete, although The Leader, dead game, would occasionally try to soften him up by a tactful reference to "your utterly pee-eautiful and forceful country", before proceeding to some complaint or request.

During the enforced pause after the breakdown, those who were not clustered about the enmeshed lorry wheels were wandering gratefully across the lower slopes of the hills. It was a relief, after several days of dragooning and rigid adherence to the famous Plan, to have a little spare time and not to be pestered.

On the first hour or so of the journey I had remarked the way in which the hawks had sat in the fashion of statuesque sentries, lining the route and watching us with flat, accusing stares go by, not at all afraid of the bumping line of vehicles and obviously there for some

purpose rather than just resting their wings and feet. The explanation, said Gold Tooth, who was now himself wearing *del*, sash, and high boots, almost as a reproach to Lotchin in his scruffy Western clothes, was that the hawks had become aware that the passage of motor vehicles caused the plump little field mice to take fright and scuttle about on the edges of the track, as they desperately sought their bolt-holes. This was true up to a point. The field mice did indeed scuttle about as they heard the noise of our column; but I never saw one of the impassively-watching hawks so much as take to the air, let alone pounce on the mice, but perhaps they knew how to manage once we were out of the way.

The stuck lorry was released rather sooner than expected, and off we set again. It proved a rugged haul. Seven hours went by before we got to the Gobi. There was one infernal part of the journey, when we were side-slipping and crashing about in a dried-up river bed, and the temperature was getting noticeably vexing. The emptiness of Mongolia was brought home by the scarcity of man and beast in the desolate sweeps of view which confronted us as we made our highly uncomfortable way towards the Chinese border. A million people? 27,000,000 head of cattle? For hours on end we encountered no representatives of either the one or the other. Now and again there were the lines of telephone poles on stilts: very rarely a lorry going the other way; and sometimes a derelict lorry, left to rot at the side of the track. Huge eagles sailed above from time to time, and at long intervals we sighted small herds of Bactrian, or two-humped, camels.

There is plenty of room in the region, but room of a kind which fails to recommend itself to the West European visitor. It reminded me of being let loose in an immense carpet factory, whose products had been

carelessly designed and over-produced. A constant repetition of grassy plains stacked at an upward angle; of grumpy little hills near at hand, or hugely inaccessible mauve-tinted mountains, aloof and non-committal, far away. At the beginning of the journey there were small woods and hangers of birch and pine, but by and by these petered out.

Everything became hot and white and dusty. Conversation flagged. Whether by design or not, it became clear that there was to be no meal or anything to drink until we reached our destination, and nobody seemed sure about what that destination would be. The column toiled into a small range of mountains, followed a dangerously narrow track with a yawning oven on one side of it, then slithered through some loose shale, staggered into a treacherously-sited defile, and at last began a slow descent towards what seemed undoubtedly to be the Gobi. It was hot, bare and flattish. In the distance rose an 11,760-foot peak called Baga Bogdo, the highest peak of a range known as the Gurban Bogdo. I must say that the Baga Bogdo conveys a considerable sense of jagged and hands-off menace. It has lurking purple glints here and there and looks as if it would be hard to climb. Somewhere on the far side, between Baga Bogdo and the Chinese frontier 180 miles away, the American, Roy Chapman Andrews, while exploring the Gurban Sayhan mountains range in the 1920's, came upon 95,000,000-year-old dinosaur eggs.

The well-advertised problem of estimating distances in Mongolia became a real one. Was the Baga Bogdo 10, 15 or 50 miles distant? None could venture a firm estimate. Someone said he thought he saw a mirage, a swimming blue stretch that could well be a meretricious lake. We all strained our eyes and agreed that we thought we could see something of the sort on our own



account. The only question was whether it was a genuine mirage, or only a mirage which existed in our imagination. In other words, the mirage of a mirage. This never met with a satisfactory solution.

The column of jeeps was now well into the Gobi and crawling along at the end of the seven hours which it had taken to cover about 130 miles.

We seemed to be advancing towards the mountain, the lake, whether mirage or not, and—we hoped—our camping site for the night. Our vehicles stopped and we got out. The accompanying lorry containing the gear and apparatus was not to be seen. Lotchin was said to be in a vile temper. The sun was setting in the manner of a fat and self-contained creditor who leaves a suppliant debtor with nothing more than a faint hint of retribution and the coldness of his thoughts. The desert about us turned pink, purple and light blue as we watched.

The Leader stormed up to me. "Mr. Lotchin is being deliberately insulting!" he cried. "He no longer addresses me. He has anger."

For Lotchin, I gathered, the whole expedition had been compromised by the photographing of the bogged lorry that morning. He regarded it as a deliberately hostile act.

"Try again," I said to The Leader. I accompanied him back to where Lotchin was standing, surveying the desert through which we had just come, through a miniature spy-glass.

"Mr. Lotchin," said The Leader, "I wish to esk vere ve are now to proceed?"

Lotchin ignored him. "You perceive?" cried The Leader, turning to me. "Rudeness of the primest kind."

The Leader made another attempt to query Lotchin, who again pretended not to hear. The Leader and I

walked away. "How I detest zat man!" cried The Leader. "For me he is the total essence of Communism!"

"I see what you mean," I said, "but if you were to be cast away on a desert island and had to choose as your companion either Lotchin or Horrible, which would it be?"

A jeep was sent back to scout for the missing lorry and presently returned with the report that camp was in the process of being set up about two miles away.

When we got there our own tent—not a *ger* but a conventional ridge tent with a large blue circle on its side—was already up, and a second tent for the Mongolian contingent was rising, not without some struggling, as a brisk, though brief, wind storm flashed past. Batoch the little waiter, his dinner jacket for once unworn, was at the centre of a great pile of culinary impedimenta, and one of his henchmen was peeling potatoes.

We were issued with low camp folding beds, very light and practical, and bedding. It was evident that if all fourteen of us were going to sleep inside the tent it was going to be a crowd scene; but three or four of the hardier members elected to sleep outside, although warned that it would get cold after midnight. Even after their withdrawal, things remained congested under the canvas. The sides of our beds touched each other, while our feet, if projected incautiously, kicked those of the man sleeping on the other side of the tent.

Charles, just across from me, was complaining bitterly about a nauseating smell, and its provenance was not hard to find. Just above his head there was a large and repulsive-looking damp stain on the inside of the tent, where apparently several eggs—not of the freshest—had broken during one of the more bumpy stretches of our recent travel. Someone made an ill-timed quip to the effect that Charles was fortunate in not having had a

95 million-year-old dinosaur's egg broken about his ears.

Meanwhile, The Professor's latest seminar was in full swing. The Professor was, quite literally, in his element, for the subject of deserts is his top speciality.

"I suppose you are all aware," he was saying, "that it would be possible to walk all the way from the spot where we are now standing to the Atlantic Ocean without leaving a typical desert area?"

We shook our heads non-committally.

"Ah. The flora which you perceive about you is some 20 million to 60 million years old in character. It is an old and remarkably stable vegetation, which indicates that little has happened in this region during that time. This vegetation is precisely what the ancient Mongols must have seen. And this very landscape may well have been gazed upon by Genghis Khan himself."

In fact there was a good deal of vegetation round our camping site. We had passed a few stunted trees in the last few miles of the journey, including white-barked 'zags', and there was a tufty expanse of scrawny, pinkish-hued plants of the tamarisk family, which resembled the sage-brush encountered on the deserts and plains of North America. There were thousands of wild onions, with attractive mauve flowers, and wild chives. I picked another small flower, resembling thrift, with a scabious-like tint. Water is plentiful in most parts of the Gobi, not far beneath the surface, and there are water-holes here and there. There is heavy rainfall in places and a rain-storm was in fact in progress not far away, although it never quite reached us.

With a wave of his hand The Professor took up the thread of his remarks. "To the Chinese, the Gobi is known as the *Shamo* or *Han-Hai* (meaning 'sea of sand'). A sandy soil, heavily charged with alkalis, is the general

characteristic; but as you have already observed, true sandy wastes are comparatively rare and small, especially in the middle and eastern part of the desert. Nearly the whole of this vast region—the Gobi in its widest sense—has inland drainage. The total area is at least 300,000 square miles, and it is 1,800 miles long and 400 miles wide.

“We must thank such pioneers as Prjevalsky, the brothers Grum-Grjimailo, Roborovsky, Pievstov, Bogdanovitch, and of course Sven Hedin, for much of our knowledge of the region.”

Just as one range of mountains is not dissimilar from another, so deserts tend inescapably to run to type. If you have seen one, then you can safely take the others more or less for granted; and if they could have substituted an air-conditioned motel and a filling station for the tent, and the camel's dung fires which were now beginning to smoke briskly at our feet, I would have accepted without question the assurance that we were crossing the Mojave in California.

This is not to say that I dislike deserts. On the contrary, I share the rather trite reactions that they arouse in most onlookers, although whether I should care to live in one for any length of time I rather doubt. Evening on a desert usually encourages the gentler passions and sets the clichés to forming themselves mercilessly in the mind; such adjectives as ‘haunting’, ‘mysterious’, and ‘luminous afterglow’ proving themselves abnormally persistent.

The lack of cover and the luminous afterglow on this occasion combined to produce a highly unromantic, not to say embarrassing, situation. The tiny canvas erection which had been provided by the officials as a latrine had long since blown away in the windstorm, and so we went wandering off in various directions, intent on seeking al

fresco arrangements. But in an atmosphere where an eagle can see for thirty miles and with only the low sagebrush to act as inadequate cover, some long walks were entailed. While distance on this occasion could scarcely be said to lend enchantment, at least it served to prevent disenchantment.

Dried camel's dung, once it gets going, produces a surprisingly hot and vigorous fire, with some acrid blue smoke. If one keeps to the leeward of it all is well; and it makes a grateful antidote to the chill of the desert evening.

Attracted, conceivably, by the fire, which may have struck a chord in their nostrils (although The Professor insisted that they were seeking salt) a number of camels came padding up to the tent. Jimmy advanced and began tickling one of them behind the ears, which it seemed to appreciate; but after my experience with the horse and the dog, I did not join him.

At last the little waiter had got the food prepared to his liking and came across with the first trayfuls. After thirteen hours without food it tasted splendid; particularly the caviare with which we started. We felt it to be an inspired touch on Batoch's part to have produced caviare in the desert; although Arnspurger struck a slightly menacing note of warning that the caviare, after such a long period without refrigeration, might be a bit off; adding that "ptomaine poisoning caused by bad caviare is well known to be the worst form there is". After that came one of the little waiter's best soups, and then the usual procession of enormous courses. An hour later we were pushing back our final plates, replete. But the little waiter seemed to have something on his mind, and indicated with urgent gestures that we must stay where we were. He and a helper quickly collected all the dirty dishes and we could hear them being washed up.

A few minutes later Batoch was back. "You want dinner right away," he asked, "or wait few minutes?"

"Dinner?" we echoed, amazed. "But we've just had it."

"No, no, not dinner," said Batoch. "That lunch. Dinner coming now."

He was not joking. Distressed that we had missed our lunch, he quite seriously expected us to eat lunch and dinner on top of one another to make amends.

Finally he understood that it was impossible to tackle a second five-course meal; but this had to be done diplomatically as Batoch was a man whose feelings we were anxious to avoid hurting. We finally managed it and he accepted the refusal of dinner with good grace. "But the lunch was delicious," we assured him. "Please don't mention it," he murmured, disappearing backwards into the mysterious afterglow.

The last traces of the sun, faithfully photographed to the end by The Leader, had vanished and night had fallen. The camel's dung fire was still vigorous and the Germans were intent on having a roistering camp-fire sing-song. Although cordially invited to join them, I cried off, because the only lubricant on offer was a huge wheel-shaped bottle of slivovitz. I decline few forms of alcohol, but unluckily slivo is one of them.

Just before the jollity got going, Behrens produced his short-wave radio set and started trying to tune in on a Western station. One of the many drawbacks of such an assignment as Mongolia is the feeling of being almost completely cut off from what is happening in the outer world. I normally read a great many newspapers and news magazines and I am constantly listening to the radio news or watching the news announcements on television.

In Mongolia we were all but totally cut off, if you do

not count the Communist party newspapers—none in English—which had been on offer back at the Ulan Bator hotel. Marvin Kalb had managed to get a telephone call through to John Tiffin from Moscow, but it had taken him 48 hours to do it.

This sense of isolation and ignorance is irksome, and it added to the general malaise caused by our treatment. Behrens had once or twice been able to get fragments of English language broadcasts in Ulan Bator, although strangely the B.B.C. was being jammed by someone, while the Voice of America, coming from Okinawa, was not.

That night in the desert he tried again, walking a little way from the group at the fire and taking immense trouble with the tuning-in. Some of us followed him, and we stood there in a huddle, our heads together, straining to catch the Voice of America. Abruptly we heard running footsteps and glanced round, to see Lotchin, Horrible, and Sharhu, the vice-president of the Tourist Agency, pounding towards us, their faces full of suspicion. They had caught the glint of Behrens' aerial and had jumped to the conclusion that we were up to no good—probably sending a message to New York on Jimmy's behalf.

When it sank in that we were receiving instead of sending (the bulletin which we were listening to dealt with the renewed crisis over the Berlin Wall) they looked sheepish, but then tried to cover up their confusion by pretending that they had merely come over to help us get a better reception by holding on to the aerial with their hands aloft. Lotchin even essayed a smile, but it died a quick death as he encountered the bearded Leader's reproachful eye.

As I was preparing to withdraw into the congested tent for the night, The Professor, who was one of those

proposing to sleep outside, approached me with a singularly portentous air. "A word of warning, my friend," he murmured, gripping my arm. "Tomorrow when you wake, I would suggest that you pick up your shoes with every care, turn them upside down, and shake them well before attempting to don them."

"Snakes?" I queried, shaken, let it be avowed.

Placing an enigmatic finger to his lips The Professor turned away.

John Tiffin and I took a nightcap from a new bottle of vodka which we had bought from Batoch—making sure Basilisk was nowhere near before we did so. Then we turned in, resigned to sleeplessness as long as the Teutonic merriment just outside was kept up. But the noise from the camp-fire party was soon matched, if not surpassed, by that from inside the tent. For, to our consternation, we found that not only was Charles Arnot embarked on a relentless snoring jag, but that Gernot Anderle, who was on the bed next to mine, was keeping well up with his chief.

I fell asleep surprisingly soon; musing on the probability that given the alleged sensitiveness of snakes to noise, any vipers in the neighbourhood could be depended on to forgo a visit to my shoes, in favour of getting as far away as possible.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Humps and Horses*

WE were all up early while it was still cold. The Leader was out taking a string of colour pictures of the dawn, to complement his sunset collection; Jimmy was taking long-range shots of Baga Bogdo; Batoch was making the *tsai*; The Professor was closely examining a sample of the desert soil; Gold Tooth was donning his *del*; Arthur Myrland was expressing grave doubts to me as to whether the films of the party would ever be permitted to leave the country; and several colleagues were starting on the long, long walk into the mockingly inadequate sage-brush.

The light was a steely grey, resembling the surface of the English Channel on a dull morning.

During breakfast there was a contretemps. Someone wanted to get a moving picture shot of the whole party roughing it in the desert, and Wichman was asked to pose eating caviare. Unfortunately, Arnsperger chose to repeat his warning of the previous night, reinforcing it by pointing out that the caviare had now had several more hours in which to go bad, and that if Wichman swallowed any he was practically a dead man. At this Wichman, understandably, demurred, but the photographer said that if he would just shovel a couple of spoonfuls into his mouth and retain them a moment or so, the shot would then be concluded and Wichman could expel the suspect delicacy without more ado. Wichman gallantly agreed

to this; but as luck would have it, just as he was spitting out the unconsumed caviare, Batoch came up. The little man was patently horrified at this untoward sight. It was bad enough when whole platefuls of his fare were left untouched after meals, when the *koumiss* was spurned and the rich cakes ignored. But to find one of the party spitting out the caviare—this was too much.

There followed some highly implausible explanation about how Wichman had been forbidden by his family physician ever to touch caviare because he was intensely allergic to sturgeon, but had on this occasion absent-mindedly taken some by mistake. I do not know how much of this Batoch understood, let alone believed, but in the end he asked us not to mention it and we took this to be a sign that Wichman in particular, and the rest of us in general, were forgiven.

Leaving camp to be struck by the lorry squad, the jeeps set off, still southwards for a while, towards a nearby camel station. "Although," volunteered The Professor, "no glacier ever moved across the Gobi, there is considerable evidence of volcanic action. Observe the quartz crystals about you. See the sedimentary rocks. There is no lack of strong evidence pointing to former lava flows, as you have no doubt noted."

The column was making its way in the general direction of the Gurban Bogdo range and of a small lake, which seemed not to be a mirage this time, in its shadow. It was a terrain of low ridges, rocks and general disorder, about as pleasant to drive over as a giant washboard. Soon a big herd of camels came strolling along in fairly tight formation, tended by a youngish *del*-clad girl who flitted about on her pony with all the sureness of seat shown by the male herdsmen.

Just beyond this was the camel station itself. The principal recollection that I here retain is of the sight and

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sound of a hundred or so baby camels crying for their mothers, of whom they had been temporarily deprived. The sound was heart-rending, an insistent, tormented appeal, full of eloquence and sorrow, and sounding like a cross between the similar wailing set up by young humans and lambs.

The expertise displayed by the herdsmen was once more most impressive, but this was another of the set pieces which confront one all over the Communist world. The visitor on the far side of the Curtain is one more unit in an assembly line, led along from one reliable stand-by to the next; one more farm, one more factory, one more power station at which to marvel; one more display of happy persons having their sport, and slightly 'surprised' to discover that they are actually being observed by visitors from afar.

In 1961, while making a tour of East Germany, I was taken to a large co-operative farm, where the farmer and his lads seemed much taken aback at my advent. There was a certain amount of boyishly pleasant confusion; I was begged to make allowances for any shortcomings which I might see; and then I was conducted through a series of observation posts as immutably predictable as the signal boxes on the London and South Western Railway may have been about 1897. At the end, the head farmer asked me to sign the Golden Book. It was as fat as the Bible, and the pages preceding that on which my own signature was written were covered with names and fulsome messages left behind by the stream of tourists who had earlier on surprised the co-operative farmers at work.

Camels are not beasts for which I harbour any great tenderness. What I have seen of them, in luckily brief glimpses, and what I have read of them do nothing to suggest that I would take to them were I given the

chance. I saw not long ago the statement that even after twenty or thirty years of association with its owner a camel cannot recognise him. Not long ago, while holiday-making in Marrakesch, I visited a camel market, and I there gained the impression that the relationship between camel and owner was on roughly the same level of give-and-take as that between our party in Mongolia and Mr. Lotchin.

The Professor had a few more facts to impart. He supposed, he said, that I had long ago rid myself of belief in the ancient myth that reserves of water were carried in the two-fold hump of the Bactrian camel? At this I shifted uneasily, for, truth to tell, that was one of the myths in which I had indeed put a certain faith. The Professor saw me hesitate and mercilessly pressed his advantage.

"No, no," he vouchsafed as the camels wailed, pranced and sneered all about us, "a completely exploded theory, my friend. The so-called 'ship of the desert' needs water just as much as any other living thing, and the notion that water could be stored in its hump, let alone usefully transferred from the hump to any other parts of its anatomy, has long since been discarded by serious observers.

"The Bactrian camel," he went on, "is far more resistant to cold, luckily, than its Arabian cousin. The Bactrian camel possesses a thicker coat, shorter legs and is much better at negotiating the mountainous country which, it will scarcely have escaped your notice, prevails hereabouts. Camels, in the loosest sense, differ from other artiodactyles in the combination of the characters: incisor teeth are present throughout life in the upper jaw; (and kindly here contrast sheep and cows which do not have upper jaw incisors); canines occur in the lower jaw; the thigh is oddly long and, what is more,

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vertical in normal position, a peculiarity which we can safely associate—can't we?—with the remarkable swinging gait. Two toes," continued The Professor, "are present upon each foot, and when it walks the animal uses not only its hooves, but rests on a broad and usually calloused pad beneath the toes. The neck is long; horns and antlers are absent; and though these interesting animals are ruminants, the stomachs differ in many essential respects from the stomachs of sheep and cows."

The camels left behind, the drift southwards continued. After a further half hour the jeeps stopped at what was reported to be the nearest halt to a genuine slice of unadorned sand.

The photographers leaped out and triumphantly made for the sand. For them this made the whole of this part of the journey 'come alive'. In spite of the assurances that the Gobi contained almost no sand, but was largely blossom-covered, they had harboured reservations. These admittedly small allotments of sand might well make the whole enterprise acceptable to their clients; for, after all, whoever heard of a sandless desert? The photographers therefore went ploughing their way towards the small enclave of sand dunes ahead, while the rest of us waited for them. Lotchin, Horrible and the others did not much like splitting up the party, but concluded that the cameras took first priority so far as surveillance went, and so set off manfully in their wake.

One of the jeeps abruptly wallowed about through the dust and rocks, and made off down the track along which we had just come. Myrland appeared beside me. "Hey," he exclaimed indignantly, "that was my jeep that just drove away. Where do you suppose it's gone to?" I could not suggest any reason for its departure at first, but after a while an unsettling rumour was brought back from the sand dunes a mile ahead. It seemed that the

photographers had been so carried away by the sight of genuine desert sand that they were intent on making a pictorial feast of it; and The Leader, who could be discerned in the far distance taking pictures of the sand at every level and through many a filter, was—so went the report—determined to await the arrival of a body of camels from the camel station which we had recently seen, so that he could include in his portfolio some classic pictures of camels making their way in a string through the sand, in the best Beau Geste tradition.

At this feeling ran high. Arthur Myrland was appalled at the knowledge that it was his jeep that had been sent back to the camel station so that the driver could summon a collection of the beasts to the dunes. The rest of us were trying to calculate how long it would take to get the slowly-pacing Bactrians—even The Professor was reluctant to hazard a guess on the average m.p.h. of a Bactrian—to reach the small pockets of sand where lurked the cameras. Horns were impatiently pressed on the steering wheels of the remaining jeeps, and gestures expressing disgust and reproach were freely signalled to the advance party.

Finally they seemed to get the message and reluctantly started back to rejoin us. The Leader was the last to pick up his gear and renounce the dunes; but resentment quickly turned to sympathy when the desert grapevine brought the intelligence that The Leader had twisted his ankle while leaping across a ravine on the way to the sand, and was finding difficulty in walking at all.

Myrland's jeep got back when all seemed lost, and the column reversed and started on the long trail back to Arvaikiheere. A half-mile along the way we encountered the camel corps, which had been alerted to add local colour to the dunes, and there was a further ugly moment when it seemed that after all we might have to wait while

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they were shepherded back to the underprivileged strip, there to deploy along the horizon; but wiser counsel prevailed and on we all went.

The return journey from the Gobi was a bit of an ordeal. We craved liquids all the way, and our ration of one bottle of red-hot mineral water and a little bottle of Chinese lemonade proved only a pitiful drop, instantly lost without trace in the parched desert of our needs.

The remorseless grind of the return journey took eight hours. Things on the way back seemed, if anything, slightly worse than on the way down. That dried-up river bed seemed to have in reserve a couple of bumps which got one in a place hitherto unprobed. The dangerous bit in the mountains produced a left turn which cunningly shot one against the side of the jeep with stunning effect. That menacing ridge which on the outward journey had lifted you into the air only rather laughably, this time shot you upwards with such impact that your head struck the roof of the jeep with sickening effect. Basilisk, although accepting his stream of cigarettes morosely, seemed in rebellious mood. Any idea of trying to avoid rough places, or of slowing down when some especially terrifying obstacle appeared, was forgotten.

Jimmy and Arthur Myrland had started worrying about their passports and exit visas. Everybody's passport had been lifted on arrival in Ulan Bator. That is standard practice in most Communist countries. But if one thing was certain it was that we would get the passports back on schedule, since Lotchin would be at least as anxious to see our backs on the conclusion of the Plan as we were to bid him farewell.

While the rest of us were either returning to permanent Moscow posts or else were planning to pass through Moscow towards the West as fast as possible, Jimmy and

Myrland wished to stay on in the Soviet Union for some time and they thus needed visas of a different type from the others. Jimmy intended to go to Uzbekistan, a tedious piece of backtracking, for it meant thousands of miles of air travel in order to get back to towns—Samarkand, Bokhara and Tashkent—closer to Ulan Bator than they are to Moscow. So both Jimmy and Myrland were fretting intermittently on this score and from time to time the threnody of "What about our passports?" could be overheard in the background. A further worry which Jimmy and Myrland increasingly shared was in regard to the question of shopping. This was part of Jimmy's grand strategy in preparation for the lectures to be delivered at home. Besides photographs and lantern slides, it was desirable for Jimmy to be furnished with as many unusual souvenirs and trophies as possible from the exotic lands into which he had journeyed. He was forever on the lookout for souvenirs and had already acquired several lumps of volcanic rock. An attempt to buy a plate from the Ulan Bator hotel was unsuccessful, as the staff pointed out that they had no authority to dispose of State property. But some shopping was of the utmost importance, and in this he was warmly backed by Myrland. "Say, how about buying one of those colourful *dels* for your wife?" "Why, I was just going to suggest the same thing. Be a knock-out at a cocktail party back home, wouldn't it?" "I'll say. . . . Mr. Lotchin, will we get an opportunity to do some shopping and buy one of your beautiful and colourful *dels*?"

Lotchin: "What ees dees?"

Jimmy: "We would like to go shopping before we leave."

Lotchin: "To de shops? You have been going de first morning."



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Jimmy: "Yes, that's right. But we want to go back again and buy something."

Lotchin: "Buy?"

Jimmy: "Yes, some of your colourful and attractive *dels*."

Lotchin: "Very difficult. Not for sale."

Myrland: "Is there an arts and crafts store? Village craftwork, that kind of thing?"

Lotchin: "Maybe not. Dees shopping ees not in De Plan."

Chorus: "Oh, but surely you could manage to let us shop—only an hour or so."

Lotchin: "We shall see."

On any group assignment there is usually a tendency for people to drift about asking the others questions about the arrangements and the schedule. There is no valid reason why the man questioned should have any better information than the questioner has, but it is always happening. On such expeditions as an American presidential tour there is an outside chance that someone has in fact taken the time to read carefully through the mimeographed schedule issued to everyone at the outset and is thus in a position to give a helpful answer.

But in Mongolia we were left in total ignorance nearly all the time. "What time are we leaving?" "What's the name of this place?" (Lotchin and his henchmen refused pointblank to identify on Jimmy's map the place where we pitched camp in the desert. "How many more miles to go?" "Where has Lotchin gone?" "What's the name of the manager?" "What time is supper?" "Where is the luggage?" "Which room is Behrens in?" "Can they change travellers' cheques here?" "Are there any yaks?" "Is The Professor feeling better?" "How is Herr Krimmel this morning?" "What happened to the lorry?" "But are those really yaks or just cross-bred

cows?" "Did you see the antelope?" "Are those snakes' holes?" "Where's the washroom?" "How do you get to the mineral baths?" "Why can't Lotchin get a light plane?" "Is that man over there the vice-president?" "Is that Choibalsan's tomb?" "Is there still a *Bogdo-Gegen*?" "Do you suppose that's Lake Orog Nuur?" "Did you tread in the *argol*?" "Is that an *aimak*?" "Is he an *arat*?" "What are *bots*?" "Are they wearing *dzolog Shudangs*?" "Who is keeping the *delin*?" "Who pinched my *orum*?"

Such aimless queries almost never received constructive replies and merely served to leave both enquirer and enquiree dissatisfied and even perhaps a shade irritated. I adopt a policy of giving a firm and authoritative reply. I am never asked how I know, and, so far as I can recall, I have never been subsequently upbraided when my information was shown to be inexact.

Somebody approached me at the riverside and asked me what time we would be back at the hostel in Arvaiki-heere. Instead of saying I didn't know I answered without hesitation, "At a quarter past nine tonight." My interlocutor groaned but went away content. In fact we got back at 8.45 p.m., so that my colleague must have been pleasantly surprised to find himself back earlier than he had been led to suppose.

When we did get back it took a little while before we could shake off the stiffness resulting from our journey. We were covered in dust and made straight for the mineral water, of which I drank four bottles one after the other as a starter before turning to the sterner stuff. We were discussing a bottle of vodka in Jimmy's room, and he confessed to me with evident remorse that before leaving Connecticut he had taken a vow to remain on the waggon throughout the trip. Since he had already started taking the odd vodka back in Ulan Bator it

seemed that the vow had been short-lived; but, assuring him that it can happen to all of us at some time or other, I handed him another brimming beaker.

John Tiffin had been expecting to find Marvin Kalb in Arvaikiheere, but there was no sign of him. At John's request, Lotchin put in a telephone call to Ulan Bator, but Kalb was reported unarrived there as well. "I wonder what can have happened," mused John. Lotchin brightened. "Perhaps he is ill," he suggested.

Next morning, Thursday, August 23rd, we were taken in to see the Arvaikiheere general store, where Jimmy noted that a man's suit cost 400 tughriks (about £36), a pair of shoes 150 tughriks (£13 10s.), a shirt 36 tughriks (£3 5s.), a toothbrush 80 mongo (1s. 5d.), a clock 50 tughriks (£4 10s.), and an egg one tughrik (1s. 9d.).

Another tough day unrolled itself. Lulled by my desert experiences, I was wearing thin slacks and a short-sleeved tropical shirt, but as the bus (into which the party had now transferred) lurched its way higher and higher into the Hangay mountains it grew steadily colder. This was the day too when Jimmy's opium drops affected me badly and I felt in wretched shape. After another stretch of four or five hours we arrived at a plateau surrounded by harsh mountains and shut in by a grey lugubrious sky. A fair-sized crowd was gathered to watch a sports festival celebrating the successful conclusion of the harvesting. The wind whistled mercilessly from the mountains, and the temperature was only a few degrees above zero. In 24 hours we had come from the desert and a near-90 degree temperature to this.

All my jackets and the light mackintosh I had brought from London as my only outer garment were in the luggage lorry, and heaven alone knew where that was. I shuddered in my ridiculous tropical shirt, and my teeth started chattering. But for the kindness of a German

colleague I do not see how pneumonia could have been staved off. But Arnsperger, observing my plight, promptly stripped off his light overcoat and insisted that I take it. He himself was left in his lounge suit. This pleasant gesture was characteristic of my German companions. After I had wrenched my knee at Irkutsk, Reinbacher had carried out an expert medical examination of it, and he and the other Germans in the party, and also Charles Arnot, would never let me carry my heavy bag until the knee was back in order and I had stopped hobbling.

On a rough pitch some more of the wrestling was in progress, again with the slowly prancing advent of the bird men and little boys, the stylised grapplings and the hoarse shouts of the attendant *zasuls*.

I marvelled at the toughness of these half-naked wrestlers. It was bad enough to be grappling in those conditions; but the men and boys sitting at the side waiting to take their turn seemed unconscious of the cold and wind and watched the other bouts without putting on anything extra.

We were huddling in the lee of a small marquee, sitting on low *tabourets*, with our knees up to our chins. This time, although the general audience of Mongolians displayed much the same reserve that we had noticed in the Ulan Bator stadium, the applause from our marquee for every victor was loud and long, for the chance to clap was just what we needed to lend some sort of encouragement to our circulations.

After half an hour or so of this we tottered into a nearby *ger* to try to get warm again, feebly waving away the bowls of *koumiss*, the chocolate cakes, sweets, camel's milk yoghourt and other restoratives which were eagerly put at our disposal. Arnot came in white with cold. Displaying devotion far above and beyond the

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normal call of duty, he had been out in the wind tape-recording every sound available, and had now come to alert me to the departure of the children for the start of their horse race.

This event resembled the charge of the Light Brigade, conducted by midgets in eccentric uniforms. The moppets, aged anything between five and ten, were clad in tunics and shorts which looked as if they had been carelessly cut out of discarded harlequins' tights. On their heads were a cross between a balaclava and the winter cover of a World War One German pickelhaube. The headgear sported cabbalistic signs of various kinds.

There were, at a rough guess, about 250 starters. Their mounts were said to be from two-year to five-year-olds. While a splendid little lad with a banner was leading the field past the spectators, and also leading them in a spirited rendering of "Ghingo", a song in praise of racing, John Tiffin was trying unsuccessfully to get a bet down with one of the onlookers. "Which runner were you trying to back?" I asked curiously. "The ninety-third from the left," answered John. "Not only were the jockey's violet bloomers rather chic, but his horse had just kicked the one behind it with crippling effect."

The start of the race was to take place, it seemed, eighteen miles away. Someone asked if there were many ravines along the track, and if so, how frequent were the accidents. Entering into the spirit of the thing I attempted a quick fill-in on the Grand National, with stress on its attendant horrors, which seemed to generate a certain uneasiness. But since there was some time to wait until the field straggled home, we retired once more to the *ger* and its dubious pleasures. Here we were joined by Horrible, who eyed our every move keenly. It occurred to me fancifully that perhaps someone had

passed on to him a garbled version of my report on the Grand National, which had caused him to consider me as a possible nobbler or doper of the runners, on top of all the other undesirable activities which must by now be causing my dossier to bulge.

After a further long wait, during which Jimmy bestowed another lipstick or two on giggling pig-tailed recipients, word trickled in that the race was approaching its end, and we went outside to brave again the elements.

By now the weather resembled that of a raw night in Burnley at the end of November. The recollection that we were said to be attending a harvest festival seemed highly implausible. Not far off some tired horses could be discerned plodding towards us, and in the gathering gloom the jockeys' colours on the few which still survived. They were surrounded by a considerable gathering of horse-borne adults—parents, one supposed, cheering in their promising young.

The winner, a serious-looking child, was led forward, and a bowl of *koumiss* was ceremoniously poured over his mount's rump. "That," remarked John Tiffin, "is the best use to which I have yet seen *koumiss* put."

As our bus drew away from the mongoloid gymkhana, Lotchin turned to address us from the bows. "A slight rearrangement of De Plan," he said. "De veeseet to de silver fox farm is now not to take place."

A voice: "Oh, Mr. Lotchin, what a disappointment. We so much wanted to see the silver foxes being milked."

After a further couple of hours we reached the Ench Taiwan ("Peace") sanatorium and mineral baths at Khujirt. Whereas in the West the term 'sanatorium' almost always implies a place where (a) one convalesces from illness, or (b) one can be quietly smuggled out of sight, suffering from a nervous breakdown, T.B.,

dipsomania or an affliction equally regrettable, in Communist countries it means most of the time a holiday resort for the deserving worker. At Khujirt it was a bit of both. It was to some extent a 'rest house', but a rest house with embellishments in the form of attached mineral baths.

We trotted into the sanatorium, anxious to find warmth after our ordeals of the day. The first thing which drew our attention was a billiard table. Its cloth was red, but its size looked about right. It was when we tried to play that we realised the difficulties.

There were no markings of any kind on the table, so that when I incautiously embarked on some explanation of the rules of billiards for the benefit of my German colleagues, standing listening alertly to my briefing, it was as though I were a mathematics teacher who, having expounded a challenging formula, turns with a flourish, chalk in hand, only to find that there is no blackboard behind him. The cues appeared to be fashioned of ancient rejects from the poles used by the herdsmen to ensnare the wild horses; and as for the balls, they were made of clay, were perversely lop-sided, and unless struck with great violence tended to move in gentle oval-shaped patterns across the red-tinted baize. Hope, springing momentarily up again, suggested that this was not a billiards but a pool table; and sure enough, a reassuring wooden triangle hung upon the wall. But a glance at the asymmetrical balls on view killed that idea. Apart from a single black ball, all the rest were white, or as white as it would be polite to call an old man's teeth. And, when it came to the point and a game of some sort was essayed, it proved almost impossible to get a ball down into a pocket, whether by force or guile. The pockets were not constructed to accommodate the balls. Nor was it much use 'volunteering' a ball, since they were

all decaying white, and nobody could be sure which one you were volunteering.

We forged our way upstairs and waited for rooms. By this time I knew what to expect. Sure enough, the suggestion that I should share a room was forthcoming. I said no. There was uproar and argument. I still said no.

After a whispered conversation between Lotchin and the 'vice-president' of the sanatorium, I was told that I could have a suite to myself if I was prepared to pay extra for it. I said that any extra payment would be acceptable since privacy was the only thing which mattered to me. I still do not think they understood. The concept of privacy, of not having other people sharing your room, getting into bed near you, cluttering up the bathroom when you happen to want it, of just wanting to be left alone, is something that the Communists do not understand.

As I looked out of my window, I could see several blue-painted little gazebos, where the inmates of the sanatorium were gently gathering. The saddest sight in the Communist world is that of their people having 'a holiday'. They come pacing out of their dormitories, docile and obedient. Their children are at their heels. The loudspeakers are pouring out soothing music, and, occasionally, comment for all. The luckless 'holiday-makers' seek the shade of the gazebos, sit down and just stay there. The adults do not dream of moving or raising their voices. And when their children make so bold as to do so the parents instantly turn on them; whereupon the moppets contain themselves and become once more tiny novices who have taken a vow of silence.

Their days are laid down for them. These are days of rest, and the rest must be followed as strictly as their working days. They are told when to get up, when to



have their baths, when to eat their meals, when to enjoy their "hour of nature", during which they are supposed to study a flower, a shrub or a cloud. I found it hard to contemplate the sight of these sad and silenced people. They sat about in so cowed a manner, waiting to be told what to do, where to go, when to make merry. It is bad enough to see inmates of an old people's home limping about and creakingly grappling with the final years of their lives. It was far worse to look at able-bodied human beings, still either young or middle-aged, behaving like the old, because that was the way they had been conditioned to behave: dismal robots, set down there for a week or two, before being taken back to whatever tasks awaited them. I wondered which they found the greater relief, to return to the factory or to come to the sanatorium.

We were told that the mineral baths now awaited us. We walked past the little blue gazebos, along a flower-bordered pathway and turned left, towards the entrance of a businesslike-looking building. A big chimney smoked busily, presumably that of the heating centre for the sanatorium.

We were given a briefing. On the first day it was inadvisable to stay in the baths for more than ten minutes, since the water was said to be mildly radioactive. On the second day twelve minutes was the permissible time for immersion. On the third, fourteen minutes. But even the most hardened bather must not dream of exceeding twenty minutes. We were then handed towels of a hideous design by masked female attendants, unaccountably wearing high boots. As I examined my towel, I was struck by its resemblance to the carpet which lay along the corridors of the sanatorium headquarters; the jaunty pea-green, the defiant carmine—these surely were a recurrent motif? Smiling

appeasingly at the unyielding eyes above the masks, I accepted my towel and walked into my bathroom.

I am none too happy when I lower myself into a bathtub which has been promiscuously occupied by a succession of bodies, day in and day out for months on end. My cubicle seemed far too well thumbled; the stains on the inside of the bath, although demonstrably only rust, were faintly unsettling; the water, while it smelled of sulphur, felt oleaginous. Although the waters were said to be splendid for everything from high blood pressure to rheumatism, the whole place made me want to leave. I nipped out long before the statutory ten minutes were up, dried myself on the towel, half expecting the colour design to come off on me like the 'transfers' one played with as a child, plucked my clothes off the hook, dressed and got out. In the corridor the slit eyes stared at me with disdain above the masks. Never mind.

When I got back to the main building, I was standing talking to some of my colleagues when suddenly a great cheer went up. This heralded the appearance of the little waiter, who had just arrived unscathed from the Gobi. He accepted the tribute imperturbably, but Lotchin, who had been upstairs playing some form of billiards governed by who knows what rules on the red-baized table, flung down his misshapen cue and came rushing along to see what could have caused our enthusiasm. On seeing that the waiter was the object of the tribute he frowned in reproof and reluctantly went back to his game. Horrible, I noted, was keeping the game's tally on a board which lacked one of its indicators, so that the progress of only a single player could be traced. Down the corridor Gold Tooth, a *koumiss*-lover if ever there was one, was slipping himself a few quick ones from the communal bowl.

It was that evening that we finally realised what we

were up against where Lotchin was concerned. The next day's programme included a visit to a waterfall. It was three or four hours' journey away, and by this time everybody had had enough of uncomfortable travel. Moreover, the waterfall was only about 80 feet high, and for those who had had the opportunity of seeing such attractions as Niagara and the Victoria Falls, yet another long and bumpy journey to visit so insignificant a sight seemed ludicrous. The Leader undertook to convey the general reluctance about the waterfall to Lotchin. Lotchin rounded on him in fury. "De Plan," he announced, "*must* be fulfilled! We leave at eight tomorrow morning!"

So there it was. There was no longer any pretence that our wishes were being consulted. The first party of Western tourists ever to visit Mongolia would have to follow the Plan in every detail, and no nonsense.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Fisherman's Breakfast*

As it turned out, the waterfall picnic insisted on by Lotchin was an expedition which I would not have missed for anything. Jimmy had from time to time been pleading for a chance to fish, and today, he was informed, his wish would be met. Fishing rods were duly packed with the rest of the gear and off we went.

It was another hard voyage. No journey ever embarked on took less than three hours. The average was six. We had several brisk arguments among ourselves as to whether the jeeps or the bus were the more uncomfortable. In the jeeps you could brace yourself better and they were built to deal with bad going. On the other hand they were more or less without springs. The bus appeared to offer rather less of an ordeal, but this was illusory. If you were not in one of the seats facing forward you took a dreadful beating. If you were at the rear end and over the axles you got such a shaking you took a long time to get over the effects. On one journey, Lotchin and some of his plainclothes men finally gave up, left the rear of the bus and came and strap-hung near the front, saying they could not take it any more.

Twice on the way to the falls the bus became jammed on top of rocks jutting up from the middle of tortuous tracks. It was lucky that these were lava rocks which split fairly easily, otherwise the bus might have been put out of action. Again Lotchin became most upset

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when the photographers took pictures of the marooned vehicle. First stuck in a morass and now stranded on a rock—all dreadfully 'backward'.

When we reached our destination, the Kurkreh Falls on the Orkhon River, it was to find a desolate scene. Beyond a few distant *gers*, an animal or two and some bored-looking buzzards, there was no sign of life. The surrounding country was harsh and sullen. Some woods formed a dark blur on the sides of the mountains. The miniature falls plashed their way into a narrow and unprepossessing gorge. But there in the middle of the howling wilderness leaned, hopefully, a parking sign.

After Charles Arnot had successfully tape-recorded the sound of the falls and we had all aimlessly trudged about for a while, the moment for the fishermen's picnic arrived. Until quite recently the Mongols despised the notion of fishing as being an unworthy pastime, but there are large quantities of fish in their lakes and rivers and, with Russian help, the fishing industry is being energetically fostered.

Batoch, the waiter, was faithfully with us as usual, and he and his men had rigged up two big gallipots containing water, which were being heated over a fire in preparation for the catch. Led by Jimmy, a notably eager angler, some of the party walked to the riverside below the falls and started their operations.

John Tiffin reported that a single fish was apparently in the possession of the officials even before a first cast had been made. The corpse lay conspicuously, if limply, on the bank, as though in encouragement of the party's efforts. But the talisman proved ineffective.

"De river lives with fitch," announced Lotchin. "Catch all."

The plainclothes police started casting inexpertly. Jimmy joined in. His first cast missed the water entirely.

His second, over-compensating, went so deep that he hooked the bed of the stream. His third narrowly missed Horrible's eye. His fourth, delivered with the desperation of despair, almost took him with it. One of the officials sprang forward to help him, missed, staggered and fell in. He was hauled out with a certain amount of splashing.

"Vere de fitch?" demanded Lotchin rhetorically.

It was coming on to rain very hard. "What kind of fish do you have in the Orkhon River?" asked Jimmy, a mite disgruntled. "Beeg fitch, leetle fitch, all kinds of fitch. Vy you no catch?" said Lotchin. "Sure it's the right time of the year?" persisted Jimmy. "All time of year good for fitch, something like dat."

All were now almost as wet as the man who had fallen in. No fish had even been sighted let alone caught, and by general consent the venture was abandoned, the judas fish lying on the bank being picked up and borne back in silence to the picnic site by way of unconvincing trophy.

There things were not going well. Under the down-pour the little waiter was desperately trying to save his fires and keep the gallipots heated, under the impression that a copious supply of fish for cooking would arrive at any moment. He had stripped off his dinner jacket and was holding it protectively above the hissing embers when he glanced up and saw the expedition returning empty-handed save for the lonely silver corpse.

At first Batoch was reluctant to accept so catastrophic an outcome. He seemed to be closely questioning the hangdog officials one by one as though asking if they were concealing further fish in their pockets by way of surprise.

Knowing by this time Batoch's efficiency and resource, I half expected him to snatch a fishing rod from some-

one's hands and make for the river, returning half an hour later with a basketful of fish; but he mournfully accepted defeat. He withdrew his dinner jacket from above the dying flames and put it on again, leaving the fires to go out, and sadly set about preparing an alternative meal.

By now everyone was back in the battered bus, which lay, rain-lashed, beside the waterfall. This was scarcely the gay picnic planned beside the scenic beauties of the Kurkreh Falls, and master of ceremonies Lotchin was again in sombre mood. We had brought along some vodka and also a bottle of Armenian cognac, which, at eight guineas the bottle, made the vodka seem almost a bargain, and we took a few nips from these while we tried to see out of the streaming windows.

Gold Tooth entered the bus and unexpectedly handed me a small bunch of edelweiss which he had just picked. "In Germany," mused Gernot Anderle, "one is fined heavily for picking edelweiss."

It turned out that the *pièce-de-résistance* for the alternative meal was also to consist of fish, although tinned. Batoch entered the bus with quantities of the tins under his arms and distributed them. There were no tin-openers to be seen and we wondered what the technique would be. Batoch and his men produced huge knives, something like Gurkhas' kukris, and began stabbing with vigour at the tin nearest at hand. It took quite a long time to puncture a tin by this method. John Tiffin leaned across and said, "Don't you think we ought to try to persuade the Ministry of Labour to issue special work permits for this little lot? I can see them obtaining the catering concession at Ascot, and causing quite a sensation when they produce the knives and tins in the Guards tent on Gold Cup day."

The opening of the tins proved scarcely worth while.

They were from the Soviet Union, which enjoys a considerable reputation in this field, and I have often enjoyed tinned crab of Russian origin. But every rule has its exception and, in spite of the gay labels and lettering in five different languages on the outside, the contents were execrable. My own tin proved to contain merely bones in tomato sauce, and so it was with nearly everyone else. We flung the scarcely-tasted bones out into the rain, drank more cognac, chewed on pieces of bread and lost ourselves in thought.

Just as Lotchin morosely gave the order to start back to the sanatorium it came on to snow. This was for Lotchin the last straw. He glared out in disbelief at the rapidly whitening countryside, and had he ever heard of King Canute I have little doubt that at that moment Lotchin would have extended the fullest possible sympathy to one like himself so little able to defy and contain the wayward elements.

The snow came down ever thicker and became a blizzard. Our spirits rose as fast as the snow fell. Repeated laughter rang through the bus at Lotchin's discomfiture, and the sudden alteration in our spirits was evidently regarded with suspicion at the back of the bus. Tiffin was delightedly elaborating on his theme about the Ministry of Labour issuing work permits for the knife-wielders to operate not only at Ascot, but Epsom and Goodwood as well. Someone pointedly asked Lotchin how often the Kurkreh Falls froze over.

By the time, hours later, the bus came skidding back to the Peace Sanatorium, The Leader was standing behind the driver, taking shot after shot over his shoulder of the wintry scene ahead. (The snow was by now several inches deep.)

Lotchin: "Doctor Leader, you should not take such pictures. Vy you do it?"



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The Leader: "It is pee-cautiful. An interesting scene of loffliness."

Lotchin: "You try to show the backward."

The Leader: "Snow is not peckward but pee-cautiful."

Lotchin: "Ve know vy you do dis. Ve shall see de end."

Myrland (aside): "These boys are going to get into trouble. Their films will be seized, I know it."

Jimmy: "Do you think the driver would appreciate a ball-point pen?"

At the snow-wreathed door of the Peace Sanatorium, Lotchin, trying to re-establish a semblance of authority, cried, "In ten minutes de sulpa bath, den suffer, den de dance. Many peoples at dance, most friendly."

A voice: "But, Mr. Lotchin, what about the snow?"

Lotchin: "Vich?"

Voice: "The snow. Why was there snow during our picnic at the waterfall?"

Lotchin murmurs for some time with the vice-president of the sanatorium, a plug-ugly with a strained expression, who looked like a fugitive from the Mongolian chapter of the International Association of Chuckers-out.

Lotchin: "Most unusual, dees. Official time for snow to start ees October 15th, not before."

Voice: "But this is August 24th. Could this be the unofficial time for it to start?"

Lotchin: "De sulpa bath awaits all."

After supper that night we attended our first dance. Jimmy appeared in a snazzy, well-pressed tartan shirt. "It's the Macrae hunting tartan," he explained. "I've got the dress tartan upstairs too, but I figured that the hunting tartan, being a bit less formal, would hit the right note for tonight's fun. I had it produced for me by a tailor in Edinburgh, Scotland, and he assures me that it's authentic in every respect."

At the other end of the sartorial ensemble, Jimmy was wearing his 'P. J. Fliers'. "If you don't mind my suggesting it, Mr. Macrae," said Tiffin, "I think perhaps tennis shoes are hardly the ideal wear in which to walk through the thick snow outside. Have you nothing else?" Jimmy nipped back upstairs and soon reappeared wearing a brand-new pair of handsome brogues, Abercrombie & Fitch's finest. "Glad you reminded me," he said. Later Jimmy told me, "What a very lovable and beautiful personality that boy John has got. His poise is never shaken."

Outside, the newly-planted saplings and young Christmas trees sagged beneath the weight of the snow. Roses and sunflowers were almost indistinguishable under their unseasonable burdens. We shuffled through the drifts towards the distant sound of music, and presently found ourselves being led into a hall where the merriment was in progress.

Accommodated on a row of chairs at the edge of the floor, we were able to examine for two hours or more what I think was the most restrained exhibition of enjoyment that any of us had ever seen. The men were for the most part wearing shoddy and ill-fitting Western dress, with sandals or cheap shoes. The majority of the women had on *dels*, but there was considerable variety of footwear, anything from felt high boots to 'wedgies', platform-soled shoes, sandals, slippers, even one or two pairs with spike heels; white bobby-sox were regarded as *de rigueur* by nearly all. The decorum was so extreme as to be almost frigid. The bandy-legged dancers, with their set and solemn expressions, rose from their chairs or emerged from among the male groups which stood primly in corners and doorways while the music rested. They sought out partners, moving like clockwork toys, and then as the band—two concertinas and an instru-



*Two monks at the lamasery near Ulan Bator*

*Western clothes and Western dances at the Terrej Rest House*





*Wrestling match: one of the seconds' jobs is to hold contestants' hats*

*Archers use bows little changed since the days of Genghis Khan*





*On the steppe cowboys lasso a horse with leather-looped birch poles*

*A housewife cooks in front of her ger, the collapsible pre-fab in which  
85 per cent of the population of Outer Mongolia still live*





*Women carry bricks*



*Men referee archery tournament*

# New and Old

*Ulan Bator's  
Moscow-style department store*



*Mask in Ulan Bator lamasery*





## FISHERMAN'S BREAKFAST

ment resembling a clarinet—struck up they took the floor with the remoteness yet determination of so many sleepwalkers. The blank, intent, polite faces went round and round under the brilliant electric top-lighting, the brown and puce and yellow and white and grey faces, their owners executing the Western dances, waltzes, fox-trots, one-steps, with the extreme precision of conscientious children called down from the nursery to recite a poem for the adult visitors in the drawing-room at tea-time.

Very rarely gold would twinkle as a mouth opened in a smile. But they reminded me, in the mass, of the 'Dance Little Lady' number in Coward's 'This Year of Grace' where the chorus came on wearing stylised masks. The pigtails of the women flew out during the waltzes, but the bodies remained stiff and unyielding, the trot and slither of the feet machine-like in precision. Presumably most Mongolians would feel more at home performing that "ageless dance of courtship, while balancing wine cups on head and hands" that I had missed seeing back in Arvaikiheere, and that for them to do a fox-trot was like asking someone at the Palais de Danse, Hammer-smith, to take part in an unrehearsed symbolic dance of the fertility rite. My favourite number that evening was a Polish dance, but even that, with appropriate background of typically stirring music faithfully rendered on the concertinas and clarinet, was somehow reduced to a stalking match, as the dancers went round, holding hands in column of twos, turned, bowed from the waist and went on again, as though someone had dropped a penny into one of those little exhibits under glass which used to be a feature of English seaside piers, and thus brought into stiffened and brief action the tiny metal puppets within.

From time to time the dancing was interrupted in

order that a song or other individual offering might be rendered. A woman played Schumann on the *morin khour*, something I never thought to hear, and others sang. Female oriental singing always makes me intensely uneasy. There is a harsh, screeching quality about it that I take to as I do a dentist's drill. On the other hand I liked most of the male singing, which seemed to be either very loud or very soft, with nothing in between.

The low-keyed male songs are delivered plaintively and with a faint tremolo effect and are full of sorrow and, presumably, unrequited desire, although John Tiffin maintained, with questionable taste, that the title of one particular dismal number was in reality "Who Dropped the High Boot in Mr. Lotchin's Koumiss?". The proceedings were invigilated by a master of ceremonies who would in earlier days undoubtedly have been the abbot, or vice-president of a lamasery. He was a tall broad man of much presence, who wore an olive-green *del*, high boots, gold-rimmed spectacles and had his thick, greying hair brushed back in careful grooming. Take away the *del* and boots and substitute a Western lounge suit and he would have made a highly acceptable booster for a middle-sized American town, probably a banker by profession and a great organiser of drives and appeals. Undoubted authority was tempered by undentable good humour; blandness with bonhomie. He got the performers on to the floor with swift precision and he seemed adept at determining whether the applause rated an encore or not.

Meanwhile Lotchin, with frightening winks and knowing nudges, was busily indicating to some of our party that the Mongolian ladies present would not take it amiss if asked for a dance or two. Jimmy needed no second bidding but was up and on to the floor at once, a *del*-clad ministrant in his arms. The Leader too did his



duty in becoming fashion, his formal heel-clicking and stiffly jerked bows as he requested the pleasure of a dance and returned his partner to her place at the end of it seeming exactly appropriate to the spirit of the occasion. One or two of the other Germans also danced, and after a certain amount of prodding from me Tiffin took the floor with a Chinese girl who was one of the few women present wearing Western dress.

The only slightly untoward incident came when Jimmy had danced only a few steps with another young woman in Western clothes and bright green fingernail polish when she burst into a scream of laughter and went back to her seat. Their respective tempos, it appeared, were inconsistent. Undaunted, Jimmy quickly found a new partner and the Macrae hunting tartan was soon to be seen here, there and everywhere about the floor.

Batoch put in a belated appearance at the dance, his duties satisfactorily attended to. As the only man present wearing a dinner jacket, he cut a fine figure and was the envy of all. Tiffin, who had been crawling industriously about on the floor obtaining with his movie camera some remarkable close-ups of the varied footwear in action, took some quick Polaroid shots of Batoch dancing, and on this occasion his partners did seem impressed and overjoyed at receiving on-the-spot records of themselves in the arms of the dinner-jacketed little exquisite.

The final offering was a competition between two rows of men and women, to see which of them could pass some object or other down the line and back again the most quickly, it being necessary for the man or girl at the back of the line to sprint to its head and whirl round once or twice before passing the object back to the next teammate. It is the sort of thing one sees performed by school-girls in the gym, accompanied by much excited squeal-

ing and indulgent laughter on the part of the onlookers, and in its astonishing naïveté served to heighten the sense of hallucination induced by the entire evening.

We bade the M.C. and others goodnight and returned to the sanatorium hostel where we enquired after The Professor. He had felt ill that morning and, fearing the onset of a chill, had decided to forgo the picnic at the falls and stay in bed. He had asked that a doctor attend him, and a man duly entered his bedroom and took his temperature. It proved to be six or seven degrees below normal, which, as The Professor explained to me, is the way chills usually affect him, and meant that he had in fact got what would be the equivalent of a high temperature in other people.

But later, when he got up and encountered Lotchin and the 'doctor' together, Lotchin said, "Vell, I am glad to hear de temperature is normal." "Nothing of the sort," replied The Professor, understandably irritated, "it was seven degrees sub-normal." "No," repeated Lotchin implacably, "your temperature is normal." "Tell him what it was," said The Professor turning to the 'doctor'. The 'doctor' said something to Lotchin, who said, "Yes, he says your temperature was normal—quite normal."

The Professor was still very angry when he told me of this. "It gives you an insight into their thinking," he said. "For them the human being just does not exist. They will twist things any way they want, lie in their teeth. That's Communism for you. That doctor knew what my temperature really was, and he was simply lying because Lotchin wanted him to. They wouldn't have cared if I had been dangerously ill."

Resentful though The Professor was that night, it was as nothing to his mood the next day at breakfast. We were sitting together when I saw him nod stiffly to some-

one leaving the room. "There goes the doctor who saw me yesterday," he said.

I stared at him incredulously. "You're not serious, are you?" I asked. "Yes," said The Professor, "that was the lying doctor who came to take my temperature." "But—don't you know who that really is?" "What do you mean?" "That," said I, "is Horrible, a plain-clothes policeman!"

It appeared that The Professor, so observant in many fields, had not properly taken in Horrible in all the days that he had been dogging us. Or perhaps it was that he looked different with his beret off. Anyway, it was unquestionably Horrible who had pretended to be a doctor the day before and visited the bedded Professor.

At a later stop in our journey I came on Horrible, quietly going through some of our bedrooms one day, when he thought everyone had gone down to lunch. Full of curiosity was Horrible.

## *Show-down*

CHARLES ARNOT was suffering badly from the cold. While I had brought one warm suit with me which I was now wearing daily, he had only thin tropicals with him, and he was reduced to wearing four pairs of trousers and three jackets one on top of the other.

Take-off time for Karakorum, Genghis Khan's old capital, was 7 a.m. on Saturday, August 25th. At least it had stopped snowing. A lot of it was still lying about on the ground, though, and a disturbing rumour began to gain currency, to the effect that the aircraft in which we had been scheduled to fly back to Ulan Bator the next day would be unable to land anywhere near the sanatorium because of the snow, and the return to Ulan Bator would have to be made by bus. Here was a nightmare prospect. Estimates of the time the bus would take to cover the distance varied between eighteen and twenty-eight hours, while pessimists pointed out that the 'regular' bus service took forty hours. Some said that the bus would keep going non-stop, leaving us to sleep as best we could within its heaving horrors; others contended that it would stop to allow us a few hours' rest without motion, although that would entail a lengthening of the journey. Since the bus was crowded at the best of times, what with all the secret police and others, and even in the daytime afforded little or no elbow-room, it was impossible to imagine how anyone could be expected to get any sleep inside, whether it was moving or halted.

## SHOW-DOWN

Trying to put the vile prospect from our minds, we settled down to another grind to Karakorum, or rather its site, where a modern city named Erdeni-Tzu has been built nearby. When the Chinese took Karakorum in 1382 they carried out an extremely thorough demolition job and the place vanished. Its site was re-discovered and verified only in 1946.

Shaking off his indignation over the sham doctor sent him the previous day, The Professor now touched on some of the problems which confront Mongolia.

"Among the outstanding," he noted, "is the fact that the soil is very thin. This augurs ill for the future and is a matter which they will have to do something about; the topsoil must be thickened at all costs, and so must the vegetative 'cover'. This is to a great extent a question of obtaining fertiliser which is suitable and in sufficient quantities, then of deepening the topsoil and thus happily leading to a greater density of vegetation per every ground unit, and perhaps I might add . . ."

We became aware of a strange droning from the back of the bus and found that singing was in progress among the officials. This was the first time such a manifestation had occurred on the tour and there was much speculation as to what had caused it. The two favourite explanations were that the singing of the night before had fired a sense of emulation among Lotchin and his companions, or else that, downcast by the fiasco of the picnic and our all too patent glee over it, they were now defiantly taking the opportunity of showing that morale was still high. It went on for quite a long time.

There were some tricky moments fording one or two streams and some crunching bumps equal to the worst on the Gobi expedition. The weather deteriorated again and by the time we arrived at Erdeni-Tzu there was a hostile wind and sleet, and it was miserably cold. Arnot's

layers of summer suits were doing him little good, but someone had lent Arthur Myrland a quilted jacket of the kind one saw troops wearing in photographs of the Korean war. We had all been told to bring our bedding with us from the sanatorium, and we huddled up in it inside the bus as we listened to the lugubrious singing of our shadows and counted up the days still remaining in Mongolia. It was hard to grasp that we had been in the country only just over a week; it could have been three months. Everyone was losing some weight, since appetite sank in direct ratio to the enormous amounts of inappropriate food placed before us.

After a talk with the head of the state farm, and a quick look at the Chinese-built power plant, where we all stood cowering under a wall to try to get out of the wind, there was another unsuitable lunch, at which a veteran soldier of the revolution turned up. He was an oldish but massive man who must in his youth have been formidable indeed, and he had dignity. He reminded me of pictures of Tartar warriors. He was wearing campaign medals and was said to remember well the actions of 1921, when the Bolsheviks occupied Ulan Bator, in which he had taken part. At this we tried to question him, but about the only positive answer that could be wrung from him, courtesy of Mr. Lotchin, was, "He fought with many mans," and we gave up.

Off next to the silent and woebegone Buddhist temple of Erdeni-Tzu. Even on a fine day the place would strike the normal observer with melancholy, but in the conditions of this particular visit it seemed the brooding embodiment of faded glories, shattered hopes and futility. Once, and not so long ago, 1,000 lamas lived within its precincts. Now a couple of caretakers in lama's robes do duty and it is a state-run museum.

It is a grey place of isolation and lament. The wind

keened past its temples. The sleet sifted about its walls. Inside the great courtyard grew a tangle of long grass and weed, set in mud and neglect. It is enclosed by a considerable rectangle of thick, grey-brick wall, broken at regular and frequent intervals by solid and square-based towers, whose tops resemble big squat egg-cups, from which stick slender excrescences like miniature light-houses. These are called *stupas* (memorials to by-gone lamas). Behind are the bare hills and a sense of painful isolation. One feels that the warmth of life has gone away from this place and will never come back.

Someone broke the silence by asking hopefully if it could justly be called "The Vatican of Mongolia", but was earnestly dissuaded from any such imprudent flight of fancy. The spell was further broken by Lotchin, with his by now all too familiar patter: "If war, such face, if peace, such face, if dance, such mask . . . Lord Shigmoni immitch, very sukret. Here other immitch, something like that. Immitch for pray, of course . . ."

Again we saw, as at the Ulan Bator temple, the enormous profusion of the contents; the hugger-mugger display of so much that was ugly, bizarre, grotesque, blatant, striking, repellent and—rarely—beautiful. But whereas in Ulan Bator the Buddhist temple had provided full priestly sound effects as well, here the sound track had failed, and we were left to gaze on these strange relics, in this cold and abandoned temple, in a silence interrupted only by the impious verbal fumblings of Mr. Lotchin.

I wonder who was supposed to lay down standards of taste for these lamaseries, in the days when they were still ordered by their own people? They give the impression that no gift, however hilarious or trashy, was ever refused; that here was the collecting spirit gone mad. The contents of some mildly demented junk dealer's store

in Calcutta, including a forgotten lot of 5,000 miniature brass gods, was as welcome as a superb tapestry, the loving work of Indian master designers. Any sense of seemly display, of interior proportion, of allowing the real treasure to remain un-elbowed so that it can be properly studied is lacking. Perhaps it is the fault of the new masters. Since they have closed down over 1,800 temples and 750 lamaseries in the past four decades, those of the contents which survived have presumably found a final but congested resting place either in Ulan Bator or Erdeni-Tzu.

An exhibit to remember is the image of Saint Baldan Llam. He is shown as wearing a red-nosed negro mask and grinding his teeth between huge fleshy lips which match his nose. His eyes stare in reproof and on his head is an extraordinary crown, topped by five tiny green skulls with what appear to be husks of Indian corn protruding from their crania. What he is basically wearing, beyond a sea-green jerkin, it is impossible to determine, since he is hung with a great variety of yellow, Cambridge blue, red and pink lengths of silk, lending to the general impression which he creates an almost intolerable sense of carelessness. His right arm is upflung and holding a short sword; but holding it in a curiously finicky way, with the first and little fingers straight out in a gesture of gentility reminiscent of British suburban parlour rules at tea-time. His left arm holds a spear. On the ground before him stands a collection of bric-à-brac, including golden bells and a miniature golden wheel. Behind him there sidles a horse with a green head and pink hindquarters, looking up at him with an open-mouthed expression of sheer horror which had my sympathy.

The weather was by now so bad that the tour was cut short. But not before some hospitality in the temple *ger*,



## SHOW-DOWN

culminating in the bestowal on members of the party of small lengths of Tibetan silk which were intended, according to tradition, to help us gain a ripe old age.

A slight detour on the way back to the sanatorium was made at the insistence of the photographers and with the marked reluctance of Lotchin. About a quarter of a mile from one corner of the grey-brick walls there squats, by itself on the plain, the stone-carved image of a gigantic tortoise. The portly reptile is depicted as though disturbed by something and pausing in mid-crawl. Its head is cocked enquiringly and turned slightly to one side. Its demeanour is contemptuous and reminded me of that report by an earlier "traveller from an antique land" who, describing a broken statue he had come on in the desert, remarked that "the wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command, told that the sculptor well those passions read". The passions of tortoises aside, there is no doubt that this one has a wrinkled lip. The fact that it has also been embellished with Mongolian slit eyes lends a macabre touch. Small panels are affixed to the sides of its shell, which is carved in elaborate detail. The whole thing has solidity and carries conviction, and the artist, and the masons, whoever they were, were masters.

Someone in the party maintained that the tortoise was contemporary with Genghis Khan's Karakorum and it may well be, although it is quite a long distance from where the former capital stood. The Chinese demolition squads might, I think, have found it a tough object to annihilate; and it would have taken some hard work with pickaxes or even gunpowder, which the Chinese had discovered a century or so earlier.

The presence of the lonely tortoise outside the walls lends the final touch of the unlikely to the *stupa*-guarded temple itself; a sort of accent written in over the last letter of a thoroughly unfamiliar word. We left it sitting

in the sleet, a symbol of placid permanence, good for another couple of thousand years.

Back at the sanatorium, the rumours about returning to Ulan Bator by road were now virtually confirmed. Tiffin made a spirited suggestion that if aircraft could not land locally, why not helicopters in their stead? "De helicopters are in another place," he was told. The mood grew rebellious. "I go to have my sulphur bath," said The Leader. "In the relaxed bath I shall study the situation."

Supper was eaten in angry silence. Lotchin was not there, and it was reported that he was playing a surreptitious game of billiards on the red-baized table upstairs in order to avoid our reproaches.

Everyone went to bed early, amid the Russian-style Thermos flasks, the Russian-style cut-glass decanters and goblets and bottles of Russian mineral water, the whole protected by lace covers weighted down with beads at the corners, on the bedside tables. As I got into bed I found myself wondering again why the plugs of all the wash-basins in all the bedrooms at the sanatorium had been stolen, just like the ones in all the bedrooms in the hotel at Ulan Bator. It seemed a useless series of thefts, because if you steal the plug of a wash-basin, you presumably either mean to use it in your own home or sell it to someone else. But so few people in Mongolia have got wash-basins in their homes that it did not seem worth it.

The next morning I rose ready for trouble. I looked out of my window and found the sun shining again and the snow thawed and gone. Under one of the blue gazebos two holidaymakers were sitting side by side in plastic waterproofs, saying nothing.

At breakfast Lotchin was still missing, and he had not been seen at the billiards table yet that day either. It

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was rumoured that he was on the trunk line to Ulan Bator, pleading for emergency air transport. Our garlic salami and cucumbers were tackled in truculent mood.

Charles Arnot and Gernot Anderle had got up early, and had finally tracked down the yaks, but there seemed to be some doubt as to whether they had grunted satisfactorily or not.

The heavy baggage was brought down. It seemed certain that even if we managed to get flown ourselves to Ulan Bator, the bags must go by bus. Rumours were plentiful; a single light plane was going to make two consecutive trips, ferrying us to Arvaikiheere. The light plane was to make a dramatic landing in the grounds of the sanatorium. The Germans were told to get into the bus instantly, as they were to make the first flight, with the rest following.

But there were no further developments, and after a while the Germans got out of the bus again. Jimmy and Arthur Myrland were discussing the passport situation with foreboding, and also the question of buying *dels* for their wives. There was a tendency for members of the party to start strolling off in different directions about the sanatorium grounds, and every time that happened Sharhu, the vice-president of the Tourist Agency, would trot up to the bus and order the driver to sound his horn, so that the stragglers might be re-concentrated.

There was an odd telephone line leading out of the sanatorium's office block. It ran for about thirty yards, held up by a single telephone pole, and then was abruptly grounded. Eyeing it, Tiffin remarked, "Well, if Lotchin is really trying to telephone Ulan Bator, one supposes that he's having his troubles."

It was next reported that Lotchin had finally been tracked down—playing billiards with The Professor.

The laughable story was instantly discounted, but proved to be true. Horrible, the struck-off 'doctor', was keeping the score in a hang-dog sort of way, treated with disdain by The Professor. Horrible did not have a great deal to do as it happened, since at the end of an hour's play the score was only 5-3 in favour of The Professor. The difficulty with the outsize balls and the narrow pockets was blamed for this state of affairs. Down the corridor Gold Tooth was quietly belting the *koumiss* bowl again.

A small crowd of the sanatorium's inmates had gathered in friendly manner to see us off, and we recognised a number of faces as belonging to those attending the dance the night before. Communication was sketchy and the conversations, such as they were, yawed wildly like a small boat whose steersman has fallen asleep. The girl with the green fingernails revealed that she came from Ulan Bator, but just as Jimmy was about to enter her name in his notebook he was sternly summoned from the hostel. It seemed that a search of our rooms as soon as they had been vacated revealed that a Polish-made mineral water bottle-opener, one of a series with which each bedroom was provided, was missing from the premises in which Jimmy had slept. After some argument Jimmy, although passionately maintaining ignorance as to the circumstances of its disappearance, was told that the equivalent of ten shillings would be added to his bill.

Returning to the group of Mongolians outside, Jimmy displayed his Charles Dickens pickle spoon. The audience examined it with respect but evident bafflement. His colour pictures of his home and family in Connecticut were also closely examined, but it was an open question whether Jimmy managed to convey what they were supposed to be.

Word was brought about the state of play in the

billiards match; excitement was running high as The Professor forged his way into a 7-4 lead, and Lotchin was reported as having changed his cue. Gold Tooth had even forsaken the *koumiss* bowl to join the spectators.

But at last our vigil was ended, it being now certain that two aircraft were on their way for us. The sanatorium inmates gratified Jimmy by waving to us as we left, and so did Batoch, who—*semper fidelis*—was to accompany the heavy luggage on its arduous overland journey, and was wearing a snappy dark green felt hat with a circular indentation in its crown to mark the occasion.

Spirits rose notably as we drove to a nearby steppe to be picked up. It is a truism of travel behind the Iron Curtain that however unpleasant may be the spot in which you find yourself, you can be fairly sure that there is worse to follow. The converse of this is that when you start re-tracing your steps, the places which you originally found lacking in all attraction now take on a strangely desirable aura.

Mr. Harrison Salisbury, of the *New York Times*, has pointed out in one of his books that if you arrive for the first time in Moscow coming from the West, your impressions are not likely to be especially favourable; you feel, indeed, that you are on the fringe of the Orient. But if you arrive in Moscow from the East you are overjoyed and cry, "Ah, we are back in the West!" The prospect of getting back to Ulan Bator now had all the charm of a week-end in St. Tropez. That statue of Stalin, Choibalsan's tomb, the government printing works, the brickworks, the *ger* encampments—we could hardly wait.

It was a lovely morning out on the steppe; the air was clear and invigorating, the skies properly blue, the vistas vast. A flimsy little flight of aircraft stairs on wheels, looking as lonely as the tortoise at Erdeni-Tzu,

## THE LAND OF GENGHIS KHAN

held out rich promise. After twenty minutes the planes were to be seen coming in low over the surrounding hills. One was an Ilyushin-2, the other a Red Cross aircraft. We made for them with all the single-minded determination of commuters running for the 8.33 as it starts to pull away.

There was a last-minute hold-up when Arnot had to shift from the Ilyushin to the Red Cross plane, because Lotchin would not trust the photographers to refrain from taking aerial pictures, and so insisted on travelling in our plane (the Ilyushin), while Horrible scrutinised the cameras in the other one. The flights proved brief, uneventful and enjoyable, since we flew low enough to gain a good view of the scenery, a circumstance increasingly rare in the jet age. At Arvaikiheere we transferred as fast as possible to Mongol 103 (Jimmy cast a wistful look at the tantalisingly photogenic presence of the hostess in the blue *del*) and were back at Ulan Bator for a late lunch.

At the hotel we encountered the welcome sight of Marvin Kalb, the Moscow correspondent of the Columbia Broadcasting System. He explained that he had been held up for three days in Irkutsk because the combination of a main runway under repair and heavy rain had made take-offs for Ulan Bator dangerous. Lotchin had done his best to prevent him from even leaving Moscow, having cabled the Mongolian Ambassador there to suggest that Kalb wait for a subsequent party of tourists to be organised. The Ambassador had brushed this aside.

The delay at Irkutsk had proved of advantage, for instead of falling into Lotchin's clutches, like the rest of us, Kalb had enjoyed three days of almost totally unimpeded and unsurveyed freedom in Ulan Bator by himself. The guide-companion assigned to him, far

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from being a member of the Tourist Organisation, was a highly intelligent and civilised member of the academic world, who put no obstacles in Kalb's way. Thus Kalb made our mouths water with descriptions of how he had walked about the capital as the whim dictated, visited the Russian Embassy several times (he speaks excellent Russian), talked to various high Mongolian officials, and gone to look at the market—the market which Lotchin had said did not exist.

The market was well worth a visit, Kalb reported. It consisted of a large field, near the Ulan Bator Buddhist temple, with a row of little wooden booths in one corner. About 5,000 people, he estimated, were gathered there on a Saturday afternoon, busily bargaining. The most unlikely objects were on offer, such as old ash-trays and odd lengths of used lead piping. (I suppose that is where all the wash-basin plugs ended up.) The technique was for a would-be seller to walk into the field, choose a handy corner and squat on his heels, waiting and mutely holding out whatever he had for sale. After a while, others would begin to congregate around him, and following a scrutiny of the item on offer, the bidding would begin.

The bargaining invariably proved very tough and continued sometimes for as much as an hour or more. Often a Chinese would be involved in the deal, bargaining with intense shrewdness, which is one of the reasons why they are usually unpopular in Mongolia. There were Russian women disposing of some of their used clothes and shoes, which were being sought avidly by the crowd. Altogether it was a lively and amusing scene of which Kalb got many excellent still shots, and far removed in atmosphere from the imitation GUM with which Lotchin had fobbed off the rest of us.

It was a pleasure to have an addition to our embattled

band, bringing news of the outside world, to say nothing of some Scotch whisky which he generously shared. Marvin Kalb, educated at the City College of New York and Harvard, is a knowledgeable man and, with his experience of Moscow life, we all turned to him for advice as to Communist ways during the crisis which was about to burst.

Lunch was a late one. It finally ended at 5.30 that evening after having included a massive show-down with Lotchin and Sharhu. The meal was about half-way through, the conversation being much enlivened by Kalb's arrival, when Lotchin announced that we would be leaving in half an hour "for de rest house". Uproar. Consternation. The clatter of forks flung down and knives pushed aside. The rest house, far from being on the outskirts of Ulan Bator, as we had been first led to believe, was between three and four hours away, along yet another of the appalling tracks.

Lotchin: "It is part of De Plan and De Plan must be fulfilled."

The Leader: "Mr. Lotchin, ve are all ferry tired and vish to stay here in the hotel tonight."

Lotchin: "But De Plan——"

A Voice: "Damn the ruddy plan."

Lotchin: "—says you must rest tonight, so you *must rest*."

The Leader: "But ve can equally vell rest here in zis superb hotel."

Lotchin: "De Plan say you rest in de rest house."

The Leader: "Zis is absurd."

Lotchin: "Ve leaf now in 25 minutes."

At this point I leaned forward and delivered some rather pointed comments about the visit in general and Lotchin in particular, which I had been waiting to make for some time. I think my homily was appreciated by most of my colleagues.



## SHOW-DOWN

The gist of my remarks was that if Lotchin really wanted Mongolia not to be thought of as 'backward' he was out of luck where I was concerned, since I regarded his own behaviour as not only backward but positively childish. I congratulated him on his genius—his genius for antagonising visitors to his country. I suggested that in Mongolia's next five-year plan a special appropriation should be ear-marked to enable Mr. Lotchin to learn English. I asked him if he were so unintelligent that he was prepared to disregard the fact that we nearly all represented important opinion-forming organisations in the West, and could do much either to encourage or halt future visits to Mongolia by Western travellers through what we wrote, said or pictured, merely in order to stick to his doctrinaire and inflexible Plan.

I learned afterwards that the main preoccupation of my listening colleagues while this was going on was that, because I was speaking fast and with no little vehemence, Lotchin might not get all of it. But it seemed that he did, for when, as my peroration, I declared that I for one flatly refused to leave the hotel any more that day and would positively not go to the rest house "as I am sick and tired of being pushed around, told what to do, generally pestered and followed about by your stupid goons of police", Lotchin, stung, cried, "You too are police!"

The argument raged on, with nearly everyone having his say at one time or another. The Professor, speaking deliberately in low-keyed tones and employing the rotund phrases of a diplomatic communiqué in a praiseworthy attempt to take the heat out of the exchanges, made a good point. He reminded Lotchin that the Plan had called for us to leave the sanatorium early that day and reach Ulan Bator by 10 a.m. Through no fault of the officials, that had not happened,

and in consequence the Plan had not been adhered to. Here we were, many hours behind schedule, but still being told to embark on another exhausting journey. Since the Plan had not been strictly followed in the one instance, then surely, in view of our travel-weariness, it could be changed in this other respect? Lotchin shook his head.

Next a dramatic turn of events. Krimmel, the former U-boat commander, had turned a bright red and complained of feeling ill. Solicitously, The Leader, in his capacity of doctor, jumped to his feet, rushed to his fellow-countryman's chair, and took his pulse. "Great 'eavens!" he ejaculated, staring in patent disbelief at his wristwatch. "Rarely eff I encountered so racing a blood-beat! Forty or fifty blows swifter than customary. I insist that Herr Krimmel seeks instantly ze bet!" Thus excused, Krimmel rose and made unsteadily for the door.

Lotchin had been watching this piece of by-play with an expression remarkably like that of the stone tortoise, what time he fitted another of his two-thirds paper, one-third tobacco cigarettes into the right-hand socket of his lips. Intercepting the cynical gaze of our un-loved mentor, The Leader cried, "Bot zis is *not* a tirty trick!"

Regaining his seat, The Leader then suggested a compromise. If we could be allowed to stay the night at the hotel, as we all so ardently wished to do, we would be prepared to go to the rest house first thing the next morning. Lotchin shook his head. Fury rose again in all quarters. Jimmy then had his turn, making an eloquent little plea, along the lines of his basic thesis concerning understanding between peoples. "We *want* to like Mongolia. We *want* to leave your country harbouring nothing but kindly feelings towards you, but is this the right way to go about it?"

After well over an hour of all this, The Leader

## SHOW-DOWN

delivered an ultimatum—we must see vice-president Sharhu, of the Tourist Agency. Reluctantly Lotchin agreed, and Gold Tooth was despatched to bring him along. I seized the chance of the interlude to go up to the suite I shared with Charles Arnot and snatch a bath.

I was told later that after I had gloweringly stalked from the dining-room, leaving Lotchin and my remaining colleagues in tense silence over the remnants of the lunch, Alfred Strobel made a memorable contribution to the proceedings. Strobel, it may be recalled, was the tactiturn Bavarian photographer. As he spoke no English, and I, unfortunately, have no German, I was left in ignorance of anything he had had to say throughout the trip.

But on this occasion he reportedly looked up suddenly and asked Lotchin: "Do you know if we're getting any dessert?"

When I got back from my bath Sharhu had arrived and was sitting at the head of the table. He looked as glum and unforthcoming as Lotchin and the fanciful thought flashed across my mind that if they could be dressed up in the fashion of Saint Baldan Llam, back at Erdeni-Tzu, and set down sitting tailor-wise side by side in the Palace of the Khans they would make a menacing pair indeed.

Sharhu spoke no English, and Lotchin, translating, was saying that Sharhu could see no more merit in our protests than could Lotchin himself, and that he too was insisting that we leave for the rest house without more ado.

The Professor was anxious to speak but was twice impulsively balked by Gernot Anderle. Seizing a spoon, The Professor angrily pounded the table with it, crying, "Can I have the floor, *please*?" He then made another excellently tactful statement, marshalling the reasons

why the journey should not be undertaken that night. Lotchin and Sharhu shook their heads in unison.

Then came a gambit which clearly was intended to shake us into surrender, but which I for one greeted with obvious pleasure. If, said Lotchin, after having whispered with Sharhu, we persisted in breaking our pledge to follow out De Plan, then they too felt themselves no longer bound by it, and in these circumstances they would find themselves under the obligation of seeing us on to the first aircraft leaving for Irkutsk.

In the silence that followed there came a touch of inspiration from the old Moscow hand, Kalb. Suavely he suggested that there should be a break in the talks to enable us to discuss the situation among ourselves. This was agreed to and Lotchin and Sharhu left the dining-room, followed by Kalb who wanted a word in private with them.

While waiting, I told my colleagues that as far as I was concerned the threat of throwing us out of the country the next morning was an empty one. There were only three more days to go, I had seen about all I needed to, and I was heartily sick of Lotchin and his harassing tactics. But, I added, I saw two objections: first, Arthur Myrland and, to some extent, Jimmy were there as tourists, not professionals, and it might be unfair to them if they lost the last three days of their visits (Myrland and Jimmy here indicated solidarity with whatever the rest of us might decide); and secondly, a complete break with the officials and premature departure from Mongolia could easily mean that the other and much more serious threat, to stop the films and photographs from accompanying the photographers, would be made good. We were still pondering this when Kalb returned and said that he was fairly sure that the enemy was about to give in.

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Back came Sharhu and Lotchin and gravely seated themselves again. "What do you suggest?" Lotchin asked The Leader. "That we stay here tonight and go to the rest house tomorrow," replied Reinbacher, firmly but politely.

The two Mongols sat there looking as though this were a totally novel proposal. There were further whispered exchanges. Then came the face-saver. "Mr. Sharhu, he say dat because eet now so late, undesirable you motorbus in darkness, you veel stay in hotel tonight, go rest house tomorrow."

"You haf all our gratitude!" cried The Leader.

I adjourned to Marvin Kalb's room with John Tiffin to celebrate the victory with a glass of Scotch.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *Party Piece*

MONDAY morning—but before we set off for the rest house it was first necessary to inspect the Palace of the Khans, the former home of all the interesting ‘bog-dos’ (beatitudes or deities) that Lotchin spoke of. I held up the departure from the hotel for a quarter of an hour, awaiting the arrival of Mister Bank Man. Ever since leaving Ulan Bator a week earlier it had proved impossible to change travellers’ cheques, and I had been forced to borrow from the kindly John Tiffin and Erwin Behrens.

Heeding the pleadings of my colleagues, I finally entered the bus, apologised elaborately to Tiffin and Behrens for not yet being able to discharge my obligations, and then turned on Lotchin to ask why Mister Bank Man had not been at his post. “Maybe,” returned Lotchin with unwonted meekness, “Mister Bank Man has disappeared.”

It later turned out that Mister Bank Man had been seconded to other duties, and that a fat and placid woman in an ancient *del*, and wearing an expression of great pleasure as though life habitually treated her well, had taken his place.

When I eventually concluded a transaction through her motherly agency, she took less time than Mister Bank Man had done, mainly by dint of comparing my travellers’ cheques with the ones which I had changed

ten days earlier—and which still nestled in the safe—rather than by attempting the picture-book comparison.

The Palace of the Khans out of the way, we re-entered the bus, gritted our teeth and made for the rest house. The cement road lasted for about eight miles as we headed north-east, and then it ended and there we were grappling once more with the terrors of the Mongolian countryside. During the subsequent three-and-a-half hours of the now all too familiar misery (it was on this journey that Lotchin and one of his assistants were driven into abandoning their seats over the rear axle and seeking refuge standing at the front of the bus) there was ample opportunity to observe Charles Arnot losing himself in the arms of his muse.

Charles was sitting facing the rear of the bus and hanging on to a support rail. He was busy rehearsing one of his commentaries, but every now and then an outstandingly vicious forced landing would extract from his lips a mechanical expletive to interrupt momentarily the flow of his composition.

"This is Charles P.—Christ!—Arnot, speaking to you from the ancient Palace of the Khans, in Ulan Bator, capital of the Mongolian People's Republic. It is interesting to note—wow!—that the second bogdo was a Tibetan who was related to—*Jeesus!* Can't the driver look where he's going?—to the ancient soothsayer reputed to have discovered the Dalai Lama of Tibet, when . . ."

The countryside grew attractive and it became clear why the rest house had been sited in the region. This was pseudo-Dolomites territory, with interesting-looking big rocks jutting up out of meadowland covered with blooms. There were thousands of blue flowers which seemed to belong to the thistle family and others which looked like very big, pale buttercups. We passed a long

## THE LAND OF GENGHIS KHAN

stretch of tired-looking sunbeaten stones on all of which had fastened a patch of lichen theatrical in its aggressive yellow, as though each were picked out by its own separate spotlight. We bumped through woodland reputed to contain bear, and hills said to harbour wolves. The hawks, buzzards and eagles were eyeing us again with the impersonal interest of train-spotters.

The immediate approach to the rest house was signalled, as in the case of the co-operative farm outside Arvaikiheere, by some unusual statues: men taming wild horses, statues of bears, lions, cows, dogs and—the *pièce de résistance*—the statue of a heroic-sized Mongolian milkmaid, pacing forward with a pail and shading her eyes with her free hand. The rest house was one of the best spoken of in the country, the resort of party officials, top government men, the élite in general, and it was said that pull was necessary to get into it. The place itself looked exactly like any other 'rest house' you will find in the Communist empire, all the way from the Baltic to the China Sea: red plush curtains, standard glassware, piped music, cement already starting to crumble, and that frightful air of silence and sadness.

The rest house is situated at a spot called Terelge, about 50 miles north-east of the capital. It stands on the borders of an attractive-looking stream, and is held in the encircling clasp of some pleasant wooded hills. Sticks of incense smouldered helpfully in the lavatories and a single roar of "Nyet!" from me sufficed to send the manager flying when he tried to suggest that we should double up. (In this case everyone had cause to be very thankful over my firm stand. At night the cold was wintry and we all took the eiderdown off the second bed in the room to add to our own eiderdown.)

The general dining-room for the use of the run-of-the-mill guests, of which we caught a glimpse before being



## PARTY PIECE

shooed away, looked like between-decks aboard the *Victory* during the Battle of Trafalgar, full of smoke, sweat, smell and noise. But once more our party was awarded a private diner, which contained probably the best meal of the entire trip, including, apart from the usual caviare and soup, grilled fish with rice, and tinned pears. Some vodka was being passed about, and when it reached me and I had filled my glass I glanced up and saw Horrible sitting straight in front of me on the other side of the table, gazing at me with what I took to be a wistful air. On an impulse I held out the bottle to him, but he shrank away and held up his hands palms outwards as if I had been a prominent member of the Borgia clan.

After lunch I was sitting in what I suppose could be called the observation lounge of the rest house. It was an airy room with a good deal of window space, and overlooked the rushing river and backdrop hills. On the low table were many colour-embellished magazines, depicting those who had recently done well with tractor and combine, some interesting housing developments and a group of depressed-looking women who had turned in a production-unit record for the output of towels. Jimmy and Arthur Myrland came in.

Jimmy (indicating a considerable lump of whitish mineral that stood as decoration in a corner): "Know what that is?"

Myrland: "Why no, but I would like to."

Jimmy: "The Professor told me a little bit ago that it is rock crystal."

Myrland: "No kidding."

Jimmy: "Yes, and you know what The Professor said it is worth?"

Myrland: "No?"

Jimmy: "About a thousand dollars, perhaps more."

Myrland: "You don't say."

Jimmy (advancing to the window and gazing at the countryside): "Well, nature knows no boundaries."

Myrland (joining him): "As pretty as a picture, isn't it?"

Jimmy: "The only way to bring the West and the East together is through the delicate work of Nature, which none can eventually resist. Did you see that rainbow just now?"

Myrland: "I'll say. A lulu, wasn't it?"

Jimmy: "Yeh. Well, when I saw that flawless rainbow, I got my camera and ran out on the balcony to try to get a colour picture of it. I don't think I got it, but just after I had tried to take the picture a little group of Mongolians walked past down below. So on a complete impulse I pointed to the rainbow and then smiled at them and gave them the boxer's salute—you know, clapping both hands above the head."

Myrland: "Gee, what happened then?"

Jimmy: "They gave me the boxer's salute right back again—and a real nice smile. I think we communicated by way of Nature right then and there."

Myrland: "Well, isn't that nice?"

Meanwhile the photographers were skirmishing past the statues, up the hills, and into the copses and hangers, putting the luckless Horrible into an unenviable dilemma. Whom to follow? Hastily whistling up some of his assistants, Horrible drew a bead on John Tiffin and The Leader and kept within a pace of their every movement. Tiffin got a few shots of some nearby *gers*, but when he started to move off towards a more promising *ger* encampment which was visible not far away, Horrible—who until then had never uttered an intelligible word in anyone's hearing—nerved himself into shattering the masquerade. Plucking at John's sleeve and speaking in

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curiously muffled tones, he said: "Better not. Nasty dogees. Nasty dogees unable recognition marrauters. Marrauters bited is bad. Dogees no fault. Protect homeland to aggressor. Must never blime."

That evening a dance had been once more laid on for us. Dutifully we tramped across to the hall where it was in progress and again we found ourselves watching the dancing-by-numbers. This time we were prepared to contribute something of our own. We had been told that it was considered good form to sing a song or two in response to the solos, both voice and *morin khour*, of our hosts, and Jimmy had once again produced the *National Geographic Magazine* in proof that Justice Douglas himself had, in similar circumstances, obliged with the Yale "Whiffenpoof" song.

So that when the time came and all present looked expectantly across at us we decided to reciprocate.

First Gernot Anderle took the floor and gave a stentorian rendering of a German number concerning unrequited love. Next Charles Arnot, Marvin Kalb, Jimmy and I stepped forward to give out with "Home On The Range". I took the precaution beforehand of asking the M.C. to explain to the onlookers that the song was a favourite of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's, knowing that Roosevelt's is still a name popular in Communist countries. A predictable round of applause greeted the translated announcement, and hanging on to its echoes we ambled through a rather smudgy version of the "Range" but rendered with the utmost feeling.

It was now my turn for a solo. I decided that "When The Red, Red Robin Comes Bob, Bob Bobbin' Along", which I thought I could dimly remember from the mists of about forty years ago when I used to fancy myself on the ukulele, might be appropriate. Just as I was about to start—and the ordeal was not made any

easier by the fact that there was no accompaniment—the bird motif struck a chord in my mind. I immediately started to give an imitation of a Mongolian wrestler entering the arena. I hopped massively forward, my arm stretched out and hands upstuck; on my face the appropriate sickly smile; I kicked up my heels behind me as I progressed, and when I had completed a slow tour of the floor I spread out my legs, slapped my thighs fore and aft and then gave the final heavily flat-footed hop forward, my legs still straddled.

My colleagues told me afterwards that as I launched into this perhaps audacious performance there was a moment or two of dead silence during which they wondered whether I had gone too far. But the next instant all doubts were set at rest by a scream of happy laughter, which was kept up as I continued my progress round the floor. The Mongolian onlookers held their sides, so I was told, “And for the first and last time on the tour, we saw Mongolians who seemed to be really enjoying themselves.”

After I had rendered “Robin”, Charles Arnot sang “Shortening Bread”, to great acclaim.

In for a penny in for a pound—or rather in for a mongo in for a tughrik, I thought to myself, and since my injured knee had stood up to the wrestler’s hop without disaster I thought that I might as well have one dance to show good-will. My partner proved a none too happy choice physically. A girl in a sick-green *del*, she did not so much stand up from her chair when I bowed and asked her to take the floor with me, as get down from it. I am six feet three inches tall, and as I impetuously whirled the Mongoloid midget in my arms to the strains of a blurred version of “In a Little Spanish Town ’Twas On a Night Like This”, her face was buried in my navel and I feared that her feet might lose all contact with the

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dance-floor. I essayed one or two attempts at conversation, but to no avail, and it occurred to me that even if she could understand English she would find difficulty in saying anything, as her mouth was full of my shirt.

The dance ended, the oriental elf took my wrist in a surprisingly wiry grasp and pulled me across the room to where an empty chair waited beside a remarkable woman whom I had noticed earlier. She was a colossus in a brilliant orange dress, bulging at every seam, and bore a marked resemblance to the late Fats Waller, moustache and all. Clearly, my little dancing partner felt I ought to pick on someone my own size, and with an encouraging smile she flitted off. A voice murmured in my ear that Orangeade was the wife of a high Party official, but even that inducement proved unpersuasive. I felt that honour had been satisfied terpsichorean-wise, and I did not think my stamina was up to best of three falls with this formidable-looking mistress of the revels. Murmuring an excuse, I bowed, signalled to John Tiffin, who was watching agog, and we slipped away from the room.

Our instinct proved praiseworthy, for only twenty minutes later the jollity was declared at an end and the members of the gathering were ordered into an adjoining hall to sit through yet another Mongolian-made film. Seeing that the remaining members of our party were being herded into a segregated seating area, Anderle and Behrens thought that they would sit among the Mongolians as a friendly gesture, but they were instantly foiled. Lotchin ordered the Mongolians sitting next to the two Germans to move away and he himself sat down next to them, explaining that he would thus be able to give them a running translation of the film's dialogue.

Next morning at breakfast the storm clouds, never far away, were hanging heavily over our heads once more.

Jimmy had a complaint to make. The afternoon before, while exploring the neighbourhood after exchanging the boxer's salute with the rainbow-admiring natives, he had come upon a little shop where to his gratification he had found vodka on sale for a modest £2 10s. a bottle instead of the £5 5s. which we had been compelled to pay all along. He had accordingly snapped up a couple of bottles (which he shared with us later). But Lotchin's grapevine was working, as always. Soon he approached Jimmy and informed him that he had been appraised of the transaction and that Jimmy must pay the difference between the shop price and the rest-house price. This understandably had nettled Jimmy and a sharp wrangle followed. Lotchin tried to advance the theory that the little cut-rate shop was in fact a part of the rest house, since it lay within its precincts. Jimmy would have none of this. Next Lotchin maintained that a mistake had been made in the price, and that the shopkeeper had asked him to extract the difference from Jimmy. Jimmy triumphantly dealt with the unconvincing pretence by producing the empties, which bore scrawled across their labels the lower price. Foiled for the second time in 24 hours, Lotchin withdrew to the billiard room.

A further source of annoyance to Jimmy was that a quantity of miniature compasses which he had brought with him from America, in addition to all the ball-point pens, lipsticks and lighters, had been hopelessly compromised by large quantities of varied mineral ores by which we were often surrounded not far below the ground's surface, and were in consequence behaving with the utmost skittishness. We tried to persuade Jimmy that a putative Mongolian recipient would be so overjoyed at receiving a compass at all that he or she would not notice that the needle was pointing south-east when it should be pointing north; but Jimmy, con-

scientious to a fault, would not agree and declared that the compasses were being withdrawn from circulation forthwith.

A more serious contretemps occurred at breakfast. While we were addressing ourselves to the caviare and frankfurters The Leader called for silence and, after a few preliminary remarks about the beauties of the Mongolian landscape, told Lotchin that the Germans, while happy with the pictures they had so far secured, were anxious to get at least four more. He read out the list of four from a piece of paper, then got up, walked round the table and gave it to Lotchin with a courtly bow. Lotchin greeted him with a scowl for the list contained the request to photograph "an encampment of *gers*".

Marvin Kalb was looking annoyed too. Only half an hour earlier he had come upon Lotchin in a corridor and they had had an earnest talk in Russian together. Lotchin had talked—for him—freely, and had told Kalb that he was convinced that the only object of the photographers was to show Mongolia in the worst possible light, as "backward", "mediaeval", "non-progressive" and all the rest of it. Kalb had been struck by Lotchin's apparent sincerity and the reality of his sense of apprehension over the photography, and he had done his best to dispel Lotchin's fears and reassure him. Kalb has an impressive way with him, a serious manner, a resonant, compelling voice, and he thought that he had managed to soothe Lotchin.

Now, at a stroke, all had been undone and Lotchin's worst fears were back in full force. The request about the *ger* encampment had wrecked all, and although the hapless Leader had acted in innocence, Kalb's chagrin was understandable. As though to rub it in that he had no intention of granting The Leader's requests, which

had entailed an immediate return to Ulan Bator to give the photographers time for the extra picture-taking, Lotchin, like Mister Bank Man, simply disappeared. We were left to dawdle for over three hours, fidgeting about outside, trying to make conversations with the sizeable crowd of Mongolians who, as at the sanatorium, had turned out to make themselves affable and to see us off; staring at the animal statues, grumbling, and comparing notes as to what we should order for dinner on our first evening back in the West.

From time to time search parties went looking for Lotchin. Kalb and I tiptoed along to the billiard room, listening for the tell-tale click of the lop-sided balls, but to our astonishment found it locked. Lotchin's bedroom was tenanted only by a grim-faced, *del*-clad maid who was just emptying out the ash-tray. The incense-burning w.c.s were fruitlessly investigated. In the manager's office the man at whom I had shouted "Nyet" the day before in response to the suggestion about doubling up cowered at my approach and indicated with creditable pantomime that Lotchin's whereabouts were as great a mystery to him as to anyone.

Frustrated, we returned to the sunshine outside, where The Professor was holding a large company spell-bound with a knowledgeable dissertation on the American system of checks and balances in government. Not far away, Jimmy had attracted an only slightly smaller audience for an inspection of the colour photographs of his swimming pool and the Charles Dickens semi-automatic pickle spoon.

I did my best with the chit-chat, but the English of those whom I approached made Lotchin's command of the tongue seem that of a Pitt by comparison. One small point, however, did emerge. I asked a smiling fellow, wearing a brand-new white shirt and attached collar,



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where he lived, and he told me Ulan Bator. Then I asked him how long he was spending at the rest house, and he vouchsafed "one day". Surprised at this, I repeated my question but received the same answer, and he added, "Going back Ulan Bator to-day." It seemed a remarkably short holiday, and struck by the curious circumstance, I repeated my question to all those I could find who understood it. They all said the same thing—"one day", and then back to the capital. I told Kalb about this, adding that it might well be that the whole crowd of apparent rest-house inmates were nothing but hand-picked stage extras imported for 24 hours entirely for our benefit, a suggestion which tickled him.

*Midget Between Two Giants*

BACK in Ulan Bator that afternoon we went to see one of the local hospitals. It was a by no means unimpressive place. Its head was a Dr. Gongkodcha, who had been trained in Leningrad, a likeable man with a calm manner. The place had 100 beds and 16 of what Lotchin persisted in translating as "cabinets". There was considerable argument over just what this meant and a number of my colleagues finally settled for "clinic", but I remained dissatisfied on this score. There were 30 doctors, including three surgeons, in the hospital, which had a brand-new wing; 200 nurses and male orderlies; and between 200 and 300 outpatients attended daily. The building had been put up at a cost of 1,500,000 tughriks (£134,000); the equipment, much of it from Czechoslovakia, had cost 2,000,000 tughriks (£179,000), and the hospital cost 2½ million tughriks (£223,000) a year to run. After we had had the statement about "no polio in Mongolia", followed by the modifications of it, Dr. Gongkodcha told us that the average life-span for contemporary Mongolians is 45-50 for both sexes, compared to 35 three decades ago. The excess of births over deaths in the population as a whole is 33 per 1,000, and cancer is a grave problem, especially of the throat, stomach and breast. Doctors are paid 700 tughriks (£62 10s.) a month on the average, while Dr. Gongkodcha himself receives

900 tughriks (£80) monthly. There are five clinics in Mongolia dealing with the plague, and when someone gave a low whistle at this intelligence, Lotchin hastily added "*Plague prevention*, of course."

There are 873 doctors in the whole country, which works out at just over nine per 10,000 of the population. (As recently as 1947, there were under two per 10,000 people.) There are 2,518 nurses and 283 laboratory assistants, 403 obstetricians and the same number of pharmacutists. There are 130 chemist's shops, 19 T.B. clinics, 19 prophylactic stations and 19 "*koumiss-cure institutions*", the last-named category being one which I would go to any lengths to avoid.

We toured the hospital with the doctor, who was understandably proud of it. The Czech-supplied X-ray apparatus and the operating rooms and their contents looked impressively modern, and perfectly clean. The Leader created a minor sensation by pointing out that he is a qualified surgeon, and asking if he could be allowed to come and watch an operation in progress, though not necessarily to photograph it. Dr. Gongkodcha, according to Lotchin, said rather unconvincingly, "We are not operating this week."

In contrast to the modern equipment was an example of the traditional Chinese needle puncture treatment, which has been adopted by the Mongolians, and which was being applied to three female patients. The treatment, which may involve the insertion of as many as 300 or more short steel needles, which do not draw blood, is thought to provide a sovereign relief for nervous tension, rheumatism, liver trouble and migraine. The Mongolians swear by it, as, presumably, do the Chinese. One of the women had nearly 50 of the needles stuck into the skin of her face, while the others were festooned with needles about the knee and shoulder respectively.

At supper that night there were renewed rumours that Lotchin had decided to seize all the films at our departure and the photographers were busy trying to decide on group counter-action. After supper, Lotchin announced that he was prepared to accompany us to the GUM to do the shopping for which Jimmy and Myrland had pined, but when we got to the store it proved not to stock any *dels*. (Neither Jimmy nor Myrland ever managed to buy one.) Indeed, the GUM, predictably enough, stocked nothing much that anybody wanted, concerning itself mainly with standardised household goods from Western satellite countries, glassware, crockery, cutlery and so forth, or trashy, assembly-line 'souvenirs' whose character discouraged even Jimmy.

The Leader and Anderle both bought gaily caparisoned Mongolian bows, the latter perhaps to demonstrate for the benefit of family and friends in Germany that virtuosity in archery with which he had astonished everyone out on the steppe. At the liquor counter Lotchin disapprovingly looked on while we laid in vodka at the £2 10s. rate, but even he was unable to think of a reason for making us pay, on this occasion, the difference between the low and the high rate.

From having originally shown reluctance over the shopping idea, Lotchin had changed into the role of eager salesman, constantly drawing attention to the most unlikely objects or nudging us over to counters which had been overlooked. At one point he had trapped Myrland, who was standing gazing at a huge piece of Mongolian embroidery, the size of a flag on top of a building, held up for his approval by the salesgirl and an enticingly-smiling Lotchin, depicting an intrepid Mongol cavalier galloping towards a herd of wild horses. As I passed, Myrland was saying, "It's beautiful, just beautiful. But tell me—have you got anything a little smaller?"

## MIDGET BETWEEN TWO GIANTS

A fat, happy-looking woman carrying a sizeable valise, who had been shambling round in our wake, began to look vaguely familiar, and I suddenly realised that it was none other than Mrs. Bank Lady, forehandedly provided by Lotchin in case any of our purchases needed on-the-spot financing. I think that her services were not in the end called upon, but when she said her good-nights she looked so pleased that you would have concluded that she had spent the evening involved in the most profitable and numerous fiscal deals imaginable.

That evening too, it being a Tuesday rather than a Sunday, three of the long-promised Mongolian journalists were produced for our edification. We sat making stilted conversation in Jimmy's room, but we did not get very far. The whole concept of journalism and journalists is so wildly different in a Communist country from that accepted in the West that it would take many hours of the most detailed and patient explanation even to begin to find some sort of common ground—and that is assuming that one side or the other was fluent in the other's language. But to hope to arrive at any satisfactory conclusions in an encounter lasting a bare hour and translated by Lotchin was of course futile. Getting each other's names and the names of the papers for which we and they worked was a process which by itself consumed most of the first twenty minutes.

Anyway, for what it is worth, one of the trio, a 41-year-old man named Chimit Dorch, who declared that he was head of the letters-to-the-editor section of the newspaper *Truth*, told us that Mongolia has 30 newspapers all told and 20 magazines. The total circulation of the newspapers and magazines combined is 450,000, "which means that each publication is read by two persons". There are 500 "journalistic specialists" in the country, but a whopping 5,000 people "write articles",

presumably enthusiastic amateurs aching to get into print, and turning out something like the pieces which appear on the turnover page of *The Times*. There is a training centre for journalists, and "large-scale exchanges" with other "Socialistic countries". During the last year or two 90 Mongolian newsmen had visited the other Socialistic countries, while a like number of their confrères from abroad had repaid the visits.

A Chinese-language newspaper with a run of 10,000 copies is published thrice weekly in Ulan Bator, and another, printed in Kazakh, comes out once a week. The Mongolian wire service is called (as I got it) Monsomet, but its foreign staff consists of only one man, stationed, unsurprisingly, in Moscow. Someone pointed out that that day's issue of *Truth* front-paged a story date-lined Washington, and credited to Monsomet. How was that contrived? Mr. Dorch explained that the despatch in question was sent by the Washington bureau of Tass, and that "we have an agreement with Tass to use any of their material if we wish".

The others present were a Mr. Surencha, aged 35, editor of the newspaper *Socialist Agriculture*, and 40-year-old Mr. Jioto, chief correspondent of *Literature*, which someone hopefully suggested might be comparable to *The Bookman*, although I for one would not like to bank on it.

The only time that the exchanges came to life was when the Mongolians were asked why they did not visit non-Socialist countries as well as those behind the Iron Curtain. Looking aggrieved, they answered that America would not let them in, even if they felt like trying. Kalb sternly corrected them. If they desired to go to New York to cover the deliberations of the U.N., where they now had their own delegation, he pointed out, there was nothing to stop them doing so, since the

U.S.A. was not allowed to impede access to U.N. headquarters by bona fide visitors with a genuine reason for going there. At this they looked surprised. We parted with expressions of mutual esteem.

We also had a session with an economist, an earnest, bespectacled figure, introduced as Mr. Oldzebat. He had been trained in Moscow and is a lecturer at the Ulan Bator School of Economics. He wore sandals and really atrociously patterned socks. Pointing out that Mongolia was in the second year of her third Five-Year Plan, Oldzebat said that one of the main problems confronting the country is the further development of livestock breeding. I should have thought that Mongolia already has more than enough cattle, but not so. By 1965, went on the expert, the M.P.R. will have 11 per cent. more cattle than she had in 1960.

Mongolia has a "virgin lands" farm scheme, patterned on the famous Russian plan of Mr. Khrushchev, and she aims to increase her total area of cultivable land by at least 1.8 per cent. in 1965 compared with 1960. At this point, while dealing with the size of contemplated harvests, we got in among the poods and centners and I started doodling on my notebook.

When we got back to normalcy I was astonished to hear Oldzebat saying that "a fertiliser factory is planned within the framework of the Five-Year Plan but it is not yet certain to whom the contract will go".

Q: Just the one fertiliser factory?

A: A single one, yes.

Q: But will that be sufficient, given your ambitious plans for agricultural extension?

A: Others may follow.

Q: We know that manpower is one of your greatest problems. How will this be solved in relation to your economy?

## THE LAND OF GENGHIS KHAN

A: I can't tell you anything about this problem, as I don't know what attitude our government will take about it in the future. But growing mechanisation will help us.

Q: How many Chinese are there in the labour brigades now working in the M.P.R?

A: I have no knowledge of the number of Chinese workers here. Of course, we need specialists from other countries, but I don't know how many. We shall need to go on getting them for a long time to come.

Q: A big event for Mongolia recently was her joining of Comecom [the Communist reply to the Common Market of Western Europe]. But China is not a member of Comecom. Do you see any consequences of interest to Mongolia arising out of this situation?

A: There will be no change in the relations between Mongolia and China.

Q: But surely Mongolian membership of Comecom entails some fundamental changes for the M.P.R., and thus changes in her relationships with non-Comecom nations, such as China?

A: As I see it, the development of the Comecom countries will go on as it used to do before, and so will those of non-Comecom countries, China included.

Q: At the last meeting of Comecom was it decided what Mongolia's specific tasks would be?

A: I don't know.

Q: You were stressing the necessity for increasing Mongolia's livestock, but what about her industry?

A: We also have great targets for the development of our industry. In 1960, of the total national product, 50 per cent. was industrial and 50 per



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cent. agricultural. By 1965 it is planned to increase industrial production by 110 per cent. compared with 1960. During the third Five-Year Plan we shall build more than one hundred new industrial enterprises. We mean to exploit the iron industry in the northern part of our country—this will be a brand-new enterprise. There will also be great exploitation of our coal mines, and also of our non-ferrous metals, including copper, aluminium, zinc, silver, gold, wolfram, fluoride and uranium. The output of the food industry will be 2.3 per cent. up in 1965 compared with 1960.

Browsing around in the officially printed *Collection of Statistics Relating to the National Economy of the Mongolian People's Republic for 40 Years*, I came on one or two facts of possible interest: that in 1960 the M.P.R. had managed to start a paper-making industry (and so they should, with all that timber) whose output was valued in that year at 80,500 tughriks (£7,200).

Besides the paper-making, 1960 was the first year in which references were made to the production of woollen goods (229,000 tughriks (£20,000)); glassware (571,000 tughriks (£51,000)); and flour (26,000 tughriks (£2,300)). Jam, which was not made at all in 1947, went up from 11,300 tughriks' (£1,000) worth in 1952 to 152,400 tughriks' (£13,000) worth in 1960, while the production of vodka fell from 1,018,700 thousand litres in 1957 to 909,300 thousand litres in 1960, doubtless as the result of the wrathful youth campaign on behalf of sobriety mentioned by Lotchin, with the hair-oil beer keeping it company in a sympathetic fall from 1,514,500 thousand litres in 1957 to 1,129,400 thousand litres in 1960.

The production of frameworks for *gers* rose from 2,600 in 1952 to 9,300 in 1960, which seemed to suggest that

the government's modern housing development schemes still have some distance to go. (Of the 180,000 people in Ulan Bator, only an estimated 30 per cent. at present occupy housing other than tents.)

The coal-mines at Nalaikha, not far from Ulan Bator, which provide most of the fuel for the capital's power and industry, have their own herd of 30,000 mares, to provide *koumiss* for the thirsty miners. I wondered whether, if the system obtaining in the Royal Navy, whereby non-rum drinkers are allowed to have a few pence a day instead of their tot, were introduced at Nalaikha, how many of the miners would settle for mongos rather than milk.

In 1952 only 13,500 people were employed in the 148 industries, most of them small, in Mongolia. Their output was valued at 187 million tughriks (£16,700,000). Of these, the state owned 37 factories and 111 were co-operative enterprises. By 1960 the total had increased to 162 industrial establishments, 93 state-owned, and 69 co-operatives, employing 24,660 workers and with an output valued at 567 million tughriks (£50,600,000).

The over-riding problem facing Mongolia, and one which must remain with her for a long time, is the lack of manpower. It hampers the country at every turn and nowhere more than in industry. It is true that the population has doubled itself in the last 30 years, but Mongolia could do with something like 10 or 12 million people. It is difficult to see what can be done. She is desperately eager to catch up completely with everyone else, to prove that "anything you can do we can do better", and to show that Mongolian technicians, scientists and industrialists are second to none. But if her relatively tiny population is simply to go on increasing at its present slow pace, while the Russian and Chinese masses spawn new millions every year, her position

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will become more and more dubious. The only feasible alternative, large-scale permanent immigration, the Mongolians will not hear of. As it is, they chafe at the necessity of receiving help from the Russians, Czechs, Chinese, East Germans and Poles, and they take jealous care to ensure that none of this help develops into the presence in Mongolia of industries or professions which look like being permanently foreign-run.

What the Mongolian authorities seem to have succeeded rather brilliantly in doing is to create a youthful labour work force which is efficient, willing and proud of the jobs it does. In most of the new factories the intake of new labour comes from boys and girls of 18, who have just finished their ten years at school.

They are encouraged to regard themselves as an élite group, "front line fighters in the factory", and their privileges include access to whatever new housing may be available, free medical care, paid holidays (in the rest houses), and for their own children, in due course, crèches, kindergartens and so on. In other words, the same sort of privilege that is awarded the well-behaved worker throughout the Communist world.

They work in factories which are copiously hung with Communist slogans, pictures of Lenin and Marx, photographs of those of their number who have recently attained some outstanding production level, and crude coloured pictures intended to warn against the dangers of fire, carelessness or the evils of smoking for women.

In the Mongolian factories which I saw, the workers seemed to be performing their tasks at a fantastically high tempo. My impression was that they work at least twice as fast as factory workers in the West.

It is of course possible that since these are to some extent show places they put their best workers there, or that the workers turn on the high speed when visitors

are about. Whatever the real state of affairs, I think that I have nowhere else seen such an impressive scene of industry, with the possible exception of China.

A reply had now been received from Prime Minister Umjagin Tsedenbal (Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the M.P.R.) in response to the four questions sent in by Charles Arnot and me. We had hoped to interview him face-to-face with the questions as the basis on which to build, but Lotchin told us this was impossible.

"De Prime Meenister is eel," explained Lotchin. "He have an unfortunate motor-car accident where his leg was smashed or something like that, so he cannot talk with veesitors." It is true that some time ago Mr. Tsedenbal was involved in a car crash in which his leg was broken; but as luck would have it, that very day's issue of *Truth* carried a photograph showing the Prime Minister, apparently in glowing health, being made welcome at a co-operative farm the day before. Half a dozen willing pairs of hands helped pass the newspaper along to Lotchin. Our pallid mentor studied the photo at some length, and then, no little out of countenance, he said, "Ah, well, Prime Meenister very brave. He go out for inspect with smashed leg. Or perhaps," added Lotchin as an afterthought, "de photograph taken very, very long times ago."

We therefore had to content ourselves with written replies to the questions, and these were said by Lotchin to have been personally composed by the Prime Minister. The first question had had to do with the prospect of the M.P.R. establishing diplomatic relations with Western countries, now that she is a member of UNO. The answer: "The Mongolian People's Republic was born long before the UNO came into existence; it has been in existence for over 40 years as an independent, sovereign state. The M.P.R. has often declared its readiness to

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establish normal relations with all interested countries. The M.P.R. is still prepared to establish normal relations with Western nations, including the United States and Great Britain, on the basis of respect for the principles of international law and non-discrimination. It is the policy of discrimination pursued by the Western powers, in particular by the U.S.A., towards Mongolia that prevented the M.P.R. for 16 years from exercising its legitimate right to belong to UNO. As is known, this policy of the Western powers has suffered a failure, and the M.P.R. has taken its rightful seat in the UNO."

Our second question had dealt with the question of what sort of aid and in how great a quantity the M.P.R. expected from individual foreign countries besides Russia and China, and from the UN.

A: "In the implementation of this grand programme [the third Five-Year Plan] the peoples of Mongolia are making great progress. We are recognising the disinterested assistance of the fraternal Socialist countries, our kindred brothers in ideology and in the common strive for Socialism and Communism. Great perspectives for further accelerated development have opened up before our country with its membership of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance [Comecon]. This enables the M.P.R. not to apply for any economic assistance from outside the Socialist system."

The third question asked how soon the M.P.R. expected to attain economic self-sufficiency.

A: "The M.P.R. has made big gallop in its development, having accomplished transmission from feudalism into Socialism and brought about radical changes in the life of the country. At present the country is self-sufficient in meat, milk, flour, shoes and boots, electro-power, etc. As long as the further progress is gained, the assortment of domestic productions will be enlarged.

The average annual rate of industrial growth in the present Five-Year Plan will be 16 per cent. Capital investment will increase 2.5 times compared with the previous Five-Year Plan."

Our last question had been of a general nature, concerning the likely trend of Mongolian foreign policy.

A: "Mongolia maintains with both Russia and China the most stable and closest ties of fraternal friendship, all-sided co-operation and mutual assistance based on the principles of Marxism, Leninism and proletarian internationalism. Our friendship with Russia and China is pattern of a quite new Socialist type of international friendship. Our country has been pursuing the policy of peace and friendly relations with all nations, big and small, regardless of their social system, on the basis of peaceful co-existence. Thus the foreign policy of the M.P.R. is directed to safeguarding lasting peace, friendship and co-operation among nations, to preventing world war and in implementing total disarmament."

This series of statements, whether written by Mr. Tsedenbal or not, is characteristic of modern Mongolia. They are not giving anything away. They have a very good opinion of themselves. They know almost nothing of the world beyond their remote borders. They like to think of themselves as being eagerly courted by the West. The last thing which they want to have to do is to choose between Russia and China. If new faces are to be seen among the bidders at the Mongolian auction, that, they think, would be splendid. Some of them realise, despite their *babus*, despite their Moscow-trained engineers and Leningrad trained doctors, how far behind most of the other countries of the world they still lag. The élites of even the recently independent African countries are far ahead of most of them in sophistication and culture. A Sorbonne-educated Dahomeyan would, I think, find

little to attract him in the M.P.R. No doubt it is remarkable that nearly 99 per cent. of the Mongolians are today literate, but in itself I find that cultural feat of small relevance if the libraries placed at the disposal of these new literates remain a rationed mockery of what the English-speaking and other Western countries have to offer.

With two such enormous and dynamic countries as Russia and China as her only neighbours, and with the intense competition between them going on incessantly on her soil, it would be a matter for surprise if Mongolia did not show signs of advancing. The combined boost given by the two Communist giants should be more than enough to cause any country, however backward, to rouse itself to some extent. What needs to be determined is whether the Mongolians have really responded to the stimulus provided by their two encircling neighbours and are now capable of thinking and acting for themselves, rather than being merely imitators going through the motions of modern living, as may be the case. You cannot blame a country of a million cowboys, under the ruthless direction of 30,000 party bosses, for being a little slow in the uptake. The shabby *gers* amid the foreign-built stucco of Ulan Bator may be symbolic of the country's state of mind.

Trade with the West would be welcomed. Although the fellow-members of Comecom send them so much and are so liberal with their experts and missions, there is an awareness in Ulan Bator of the great range of goods which the West could provide, but with many of which neither Russia nor China can at present properly compete. There is also great curiosity about the West, especially the United States. The U.S.A. engenders in Mongolia, just as it does in Russia, a mental love-hate relationship, and while lip-service is paid to the idea

that America is the arch-enemy, it is America which is secretly the most thought about, and her ways, gadgetry and inventions the most longed for.

Mongolia's new contacts with the West, if they do come about, must remain conditioned and dominated by the fact of her physical isolation. All trade, all travel, including that of the diplomats, must be through Russian or Chinese territory or through their air space.

The Mongolians, like the Russians, like everyone, know that although the Chinese are at present in difficulties with their food distribution, nothing seems likely to prevent them, sooner rather than later, from becoming one of the world's greatest nations—perhaps the greatest nation of all. The Mongolians are uneasy at this prospect, again like the Russians and everyone else, and while there is nothing that they can do about it, their uneasiness shows itself in any number of ways. Their Moscow-leaning, the eagerness with which they learn Russian and repeatedly turn to Russia reveal, I feel sure, the subconscious dread which they harbour for China.

They admire the Chinese intensely—but that only adds to their fear. They admire the extraordinary energy of their labour brigades, their discipline and efficiency, and their keep-fit routines, their methodical approach to any problem which confronts them. The formidable quality of the Chinese, while it awes the Mongolians, induces them also to deride the Chinese for their bargaining proclivities. There is no Chinatown in Ulan Bator, and not a single Chinese restaurant. There used to be some Chinese restaurants but various pressures were put on the owners and the restaurants disappeared. There are about 1,500 Mongolian students visiting Russia as I write, but only a handful in Peking, in spite of the genuine admiration in Mongolia for Chinese culture.

Mongolia enjoys a good position as a communications



link between Russia and China. The railway, the airline, the telephone, and the telegraph linking Moscow with Peking all go through or pass above her territory. I suppose that before long Mongolia will address herself—or persuade Russia or China to address itself—to the problem of her unspeakable roads, and when that happens and there finally exists a good motor road joining Irkutsk with Peking, via Ulan Bator, Sayn Shanda and Erhlien, just across the Chinese border, motels may follow and the adventurous car-borne tourist too.

While the present superficial coolness between Moscow and China continues, a coolness which, it was noted earlier, is over the means rather than the end, it looks as though the two powers will continue to maintain a polite behind-the-scenes struggle for Mongolian favour. Aid schemes, labour brigades, low-interest loans (which are often, in the case of Russia, transformed into free gifts), experts, missions, material, arms, tractors—the whole gamut of “fraternal helpfulness” will be run. But it would make sense for China and Russia to end this rivalry, however suavely conducted, and substitute for it an agreed joint programme of Mongolian assistance.

It is possible that the Mongolians would object. A Russo-Chinese version of the Marshall Plan, however benevolent and fruitful, might strike the sensitive politicians of Ulan Bator as a condescension, might even evoke memories of colonial-type condominiums. But since both Moscow and Peking are so patently anxious to avoid any sort of friction with one another in Mongolia and both shrink from suggestions of rivalry there, it may come about.

At the moment, while both China and Russia continue to pour money, manpower, and technical skills of all kinds into the country, the Mongolians will face a happy

future. It does not take much diplomacy and cunning to profit from that sort of situation. Chinese influence may be slightly on the rise, but so far it is with the knowledge and tacit consent of Russia—and Mongolia remains so obviously pro-Russian. A pan-Mongol putsch, if ever Peking does decide on it, remains for the future. Meanwhile the Mongolians in the M.P.R., while displaying understandable interest in the Chinese magazines and other covert irredentist propaganda, have so far given no sign of any reaction that might be disturbing to Moscow. There are two and a half million Mongolians all told, but the chances of their ever being united as one nation seem slim.

Much has been made in the West of the disputes and differences in dogma between the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic. These are basically concerned with the correct means to reach a joint end: the final world conquest by Communism. About this end, Russia and China still find themselves in complete agreement. There may be squabbles concerning de-Stalinisation, the establishment of the Chinese communes, and other phenomena of Communist effort and policy, but so long as the Communist parties of Russia and China remain ideologically united on their joint goal, the basic situation as far as the West is concerned stays the same, and menacing.

The one factor which might bring about a rupture between the two powers would be an unbearable increase in China's population, which is at present believed to total about 630,000,000 and to be increasing at about 15,000,000 a year. If famine and impossibly crowded conditions were ever to force China into a mass outburst from her present borders, the nearby vacuum to receive her surplus population stands glaringly obvious. Eastern Siberia—the Russians call it "Our Far East"—borders

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China to the north. It is thinly populated, and if the Chinese masses continue to grow in numbers as they have been doing, the temptation of that vast vacancy so near at hand may prove irresistible.

If ever population pressures force China into conflict with Russia, Mongolia would be in a highly unenviable position. Any idea of maintaining neutrality in such a clash would be absurd. Overnight Mongolia would find her role changed from that of 'buffer' to that of 'corridor', and some of the fiercest fighting could well take place on her soil.

It seems to me that diplomatic recognition by the Western powers of the M.P.R. must come soon. President Kennedy seemed in the mood to establish relations with Ulan Bator at the end of 1961, following Mongolia's entry into the U.N., but the alarm and anger displayed by Chiang Kai-shek in Formosa stayed his hand.

Chiang thinks that recognition by the U.S.A. of the M.P.R. would constitute a long stride along the road to American recognition of the Chinese People's Republic, and that is the one event which Chiang, in his remaining years, means to prevent.

But I think it will come, Chiang or no Chiang. And I think that Britain, which has had diplomatic relations with mainland China for over a decade, should lose no time in exchanging ambassadors with Mongolia. The Mongolians are all for it. The presence in Ulan Bator of Western embassies would set the seal on their ambition to obtain total acceptance by the world as a genuine nation, and not merely a piece of make-believe. They, or the 30,000 Communist (they say 'Socialist') party members who run the other million inhabitants of the M.P.R. know that, while their relations with Russia and China are important in the way of material help, they are still

almost completely cut off from the ideas, inventions, literature and life of the non-Communist world. They are mostly primitives who know nothing and understand nothing of what the West stands for. They dimly realise that Western contacts would benefit them, and would in the end enhance their standing. And for the same reason that they at present enjoy the game of playing off Russia against China, they would welcome the interjection of the Western element as a further factor in raising the bids for Mongolia's favour and perhaps trade.

For us and for the Americans, Mongolia would provide a richly rewarding listening and observation post. Ulan Bator is a small town still, in spite of the marble and stucco, and there would be endless opportunities to get a good idea of what is going on between Russia and China.

This is the ideal ground for observing Russia and China at grips; for providing Mongolia with the first genuine realisation of a Western presence that can be believed in and appreciated. And, because of the various Chinese commitments in Mongolia, it provides at least as good a listening-post in regard to what is going on in China itself as can be obtained in Hong Kong. (We have a legation in Peking and a consulate in Shanghai, but, devoted as may be the work of our representatives in those two cities, it is a hard task to obtain reliable information inside China.)

Hong Kong receives a host of refugees from China, but what they have to report about the conditions there must be suspect. They want to please. They are frightened, hungry people and their motives for coming to Hong Kong must fall into one of two classifications. Either they are the lucky ones, who have managed to get out, and will tell those who interrogate them what they expect and want to hear; or they are deliberately-

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planted Communist agents, who will of course say the same sort of thing, in exchange for being allowed to stay.

The Chinese in Mongolia are in a different category. There you have 50,000 or 60,000 young men in a work force, in touch with their families in China, who are by no means stooges. Five years in Mongolia is a long, dreary spell, and there must be some among them who would be willing to talk to Westerners if they got the chance.

Not long ago, just before I visited Mongolia, I talked to a British ambassador in a European country and mentioned the possibility of diplomatic exchanges with the M.P.R. He was so patently horrified that I wondered if he thought that he might be picked as our first man in Ulan Bator, if diplomats were to be exchanged. "Out of the question," he kept murmuring anxiously. I must admit that since seeing Mongolia for myself I have realised the extent of Mr. Khrushchev's impishness in sending the luckless Molotov there for two years as Russian Ambassador. I also realise that the first British Ambassador in Ulan Bator would have a great deal to put up with in the way of being spied on; that the social life there would be odd indeed; and his travels extremely uncomfortable. But I still think that it would be worth it.

Justice Douglas of the U.S. Supreme Court thinks that "the Mongolians are so far removed from Western culture, so distant from the influences of Judeo-Christian civilisation, so unaware of the West's great books and humane letters, that if they long remain in an isolated pocket between the Soviet Union and China, they may evolve into ideological puppets."\*

My own feeling is that the Mongolians in their isolated pocket are even now ideological puppets, and that the only way in which they can possibly be helped

\* *National Geographic Magazine* of Washington, D.C., March 1962 issue.

to become aware of those benefits which Justice Douglas lists is by a prompt and dynamic intrusion of Western representatives into their country, headed, in the case of Britain, not by an ambassador ruefully conscious of the unappealing local living conditions, but by a man who would accept the first British embassy in history there as a challenge.

#### POSTSCRIPT

Since I wrote the above, it has been officially announced (January 23rd, 1963) that Britain and the Mongolian People's Republic have decided to establish diplomatic relations.

I was, however, disappointed to find that, instead of setting up a full embassy in Ulan Bator, the arrangement is to be that the British Chargé d'Affaires in Peking, Mr. Terence Garvey, will merely visit the Mongolian capital from time to time, while continuing to live mainly in Peking.

This strikes me as an unsatisfactory compromise. With the best will in the world, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Peking cannot do a proper job if he is to attempt it on a visiting basis. A listening post—for that essentially is what Ulan Bator is diplomatically—must be constantly manned.

And I should have thought that the compliment to the Mongolians entailed in diplomatic recognition is considerably watered down by the part-time arrangement. It seems to imply tacit British agreement to the Chinese notion that Mongolia is still in some sense a dependency of Peking—a theory which the Mongolians repudiate.

If we are going to recognise the Mongolians, then we ought to do it in style, with a full-time ambassador, and no half-measures.

*“Three Cheers for Siberia”*

WEDNESDAY, August 29th. I rose with a song in my heart, for this was the final day. Low, rain-packed clouds were pouring off the tops of the mountains like smoke gushing from factory chimneys. Lenin's statue glistened under the drenching, and the plastic mackintoshes were everywhere out in force.

Batoch had got in the night before with the heavy luggage from the sanatorium. The little man looked very tired, with dark smudges beneath his eyes, and he indicated that the journey had been even worse than we had feared.

We embussed and trundled along the main street. I now felt that I knew it almost as well as streets where I had walked as a child; past the red and black marble tomb where lie the remains of Sukhe Bator, the hero of the Mongolian revolution, and his close friend and successor as head of the nation, Choibalsan; past the Theatre of Opera and Ballet, the Pedagogical Institute, the Circus and the Polyclinic, the Cinema and the Exhibition Hall. Once again I noted all the clocks on view in public places had stopped.

We were off to see some “industrial enterprises” and, if we only had known it, starting on the most unpleasant day of the whole visit.

The first visit was to a tannery, and I immediately received that sense of extraordinary rush and vigour which I have remarked on earlier. No one in sight was

even remotely loafing or taking a breather. I meant, but forgot in the uproar which immediately followed, to ask whether there was any equivalent of 'elevenses' or a 'tea-break' for the workers. I should very much doubt it. My impression was that any contemporary British trade unionist would be horrified at the tempo of the work, and the silence in which it is carried out. The women and girls, the men and youths, gave an impression of determination and total concentration; not more than one or two looked up as the strangers paused by their machines and then only to give the briefest of glances. The whole thing was like watching one of those grotesquely speeded-up films.

But once again trouble brewed. "Meester Markl," said Lotchin, "eet is forbidden to take photograph." "Oh, come now," I said, exasperated, "surely you have realised by now that I have no camera with me?" "Bot ees steel forbidden," he persisted. There were raised voices and expostulations from behind us. Turning, we found the photographers shaking their fists in rage at Horrible and his familiars, who had just told them that they could not take any photographs either.

The Leader was storming to and fro. Gernot Anderle's normally happy-go-lucky expression was twisted into a scowl of the greatest menace. Even the usually genial Tiffin, seated upon a handy pile of strong-smelling hides to await the outcome of the noisy argument, looked as though he would dearly have liked to do Lotchin a mischief.

The Leader reminded Lotchin that he had refused to allow the pictures of the *ger* encampment on the grounds that it made Mongolia look "backward", but now here was a modern factory, fitted with the finest of equipment and staffed by the most efficient-looking workers. What could be more welcome to the Mongolian authorities



“THREE CHEERS FOR SIBERIA”

than such pictures? The quintessence of nonbackwardness, surely?

Lotchin was adamant, maintaining that the decision was not his but had been taken by the “vice-president of dees factory”. It was de Rule, and he could not question the validity of de Rule. It was almost certain that Lotchin could have allowed photographs inside factories if he had wanted to, for it is pretty sure that, so far as general authority went, he outranked any factory manager. But the typical muddleheadedness and stupidity of the man must have caused him to think that any factory, whatever its nature, must somehow be on the secret list where photographs were concerned. In fact I asked him whether he regarded a tannery as a military target, but received no reply.

The visit had accordingly lost all interest for the photographers, and since neither I nor Arthur Myrland had any desire to linger amid the smell, our stay was curtailed. The same thing happened at a nearby shoe factory, built and run by the Czechs and said to be a faithful reproduction of the Bata factory at Gottwaldov. An affable, if unshaven, young Czech overseer who spoke German told my German colleagues that he found the Mongolians very difficult to teach and not too good as workers, a surprising statement in view of their apparent industry, application and speed. A Viennese waltz was being piped in to encourage the women, most of whom wore some sort of head covering to keep their hair from catching in the machines. Apart from this simple precaution there were, so I was assured by the more knowledgeable of my colleagues, no safety measures visible, although I did not know what to look for in this technical field.

Behind the shoe factory there stood a crude wooden watch-tower in a corner of the outside wire fence, and

this Tiffin and the others photographed with gusto. Photography was permitted once the party was outside the various factories, so that Lotchin was unable to interfere; but he glowered at this piece of enterprise, and not surprisingly, for although the tower's purpose was unclear (to keep out nocturnal marauders or saboteurs, to keep in workers who might be tempted to go home early?) it bore an obvious and grim resemblance to the thousands of observation towers dotted along the frontiers of all Communist nations and was not at all the sort of thing which Lotchin wanted recorded.

The third and last of the factories which we saw was the one built by the Chinese a few years ago to Russian design and stocked almost entirely with British textile machinery. The Mongolian official handbook shows that in 1960 Mongolia bought 136,200 roubles' (£54,000) worth of machinery from Britain.

The interior of the textile factory, which is the only one in Mongolia, was again forbidden to the photographers, but as we entered I said loudly that I would be happy to arrange for photographs of all the machinery to be made available to any of my colleagues who might be interested as soon as we returned to the West, since it was certain that such photographs were in the possession of the firms which had supplied the machines. At this Lotchin started perceptibly and gazed at me aghast.

There had been no lack of police scrutiny at the first two factories, but for some reason the security precautions in the textile factory were even stronger, and the place fairly swarmed with furtive midgets in berets just like Horrible's. At one time I was being trailed by five (all to myself) and platoons of them were constantly bobbing up from behind a loom or peering round a row of spinning jennies as I went the rounds.

little to attract him in the M.P.R. No doubt it is remarkable that nearly 99 per cent. of the Mongolians are today literate, but in itself I find that cultural feat of small relevance if the libraries placed at the disposal of these new literates remain a rationed mockery of what the English-speaking and other Western countries have to offer.

With two such enormous and dynamic countries as Russia and China as her only neighbours, and with the intense competition between them going on incessantly on her soil, it would be a matter for surprise if Mongolia did not show signs of advancing. The combined boost given by the two Communist giants should be more than enough to cause any country, however backward, to rouse itself to some extent. What needs to be determined is whether the Mongolians have really responded to the stimulus provided by their two encircling neighbours and are now capable of thinking and acting for themselves, rather than being merely imitators going through the motions of modern living, as may be the case. You cannot blame a country of a million cowboys, under the ruthless direction of 30,000 party bosses, for being a little slow in the uptake. The shabby *gers* amid the foreign-built stucco of Ulan Bator may be symbolic of the country's state of mind.

Trade with the West would be welcomed. Although the fellow-members of Comecom send them so much and are so liberal with their experts and missions, there is an awareness in Ulan Bator of the great range of goods which the West could provide, but with many of which neither Russia nor China can at present properly compete. There is also great curiosity about the West, especially the United States. The U.S.A. engenders in Mongolia, just as it does in Russia, a mental love-hate relationship, and while lip-service is paid to the idea

that America is the arch-enemy, it is America which is secretly the most thought about, and her ways, gadgetry and inventions the most longed for.

Mongolia's new contacts with the West, if they do come about, must remain conditioned and dominated by the fact of her physical isolation. All trade, all travel, including that of the diplomats, must be through Russian or Chinese territory or through their air space.

The Mongolians, like the Russians, like everyone, know that although the Chinese are at present in difficulties with their food distribution, nothing seems likely to prevent them, sooner rather than later, from becoming one of the world's greatest nations—perhaps the greatest nation of all. The Mongolians are uneasy at this prospect, again like the Russians and everyone else, and while there is nothing that they can do about it, their uneasiness shows itself in any number of ways. Their Moscow-leaning, the eagerness with which they learn Russian and repeatedly turn to Russia reveal, I feel sure, the subconscious dread which they harbour for China.

They admire the Chinese intensely—but that only adds to their fear. They admire the extraordinary energy of their labour brigades, their discipline and efficiency, and their keep-fit routines, their methodical approach to any problem which confronts them. The formidable quality of the Chinese, while it awes the Mongolians, induces them also to deride the Chinese for their bargaining proclivities. There is no Chinatown in Ulan Bator, and not a single Chinese restaurant. There used to be some Chinese restaurants but various pressures were put on the owners and the restaurants disappeared. There are about 1,500 Mongolian students visiting Russia as I write, but only a handful in Peking, in spite of the genuine admiration in Mongolia for Chinese culture.

Mongolia enjoys a good position as a communications

link between Russia and China. The railway, the airline, the telephone, and the telegraph linking Moscow with Peking all go through or pass above her territory. I suppose that before long Mongolia will address herself—or persuade Russia or China to address itself—to the problem of her unspeakable roads, and when that happens and there finally exists a good motor road joining Irkutsk with Peking, via Ulan Bator, Sayn Shanda and Erhlien, just across the Chinese border, motels may follow and the adventurous car-borne tourist too.

While the present superficial coolness between Moscow and China continues, a coolness which, it was noted earlier, is over the means rather than the end, it looks as though the two powers will continue to maintain a polite behind-the-scenes struggle for Mongolian favour. Aid schemes, labour brigades, low-interest loans (which are often, in the case of Russia, transformed into free gifts), experts, missions, material, arms, tractors—the whole gamut of “fraternal helpfulness” will be run. But it would make sense for China and Russia to end this rivalry, however suavely conducted, and substitute for it an agreed joint programme of Mongolian assistance.

It is possible that the Mongolians would object. A Russo-Chinese version of the Marshall Plan, however benevolent and fruitful, might strike the sensitive politicians of Ulan Bator as a condescension, might even evoke memories of colonial-type condominiums. But since both Moscow and Peking are so patently anxious to avoid any sort of friction with one another in Mongolia and both shrink from suggestions of rivalry there, it may come about.

At the moment, while both China and Russia continue to pour money, manpower, and technical skills of all kinds into the country, the Mongolians will face a happy

future. It does not take much diplomacy and cunning to profit from that sort of situation. Chinese influence may be slightly on the rise, but so far it is with the knowledge and tacit consent of Russia—and Mongolia remains so obviously pro-Russian. A pan-Mongol putsch, if ever Peking does decide on it, remains for the future. Meanwhile the Mongolians in the M.P.R., while displaying understandable interest in the Chinese magazines and other covert irredentist propaganda, have so far given no sign of any reaction that might be disturbing to Moscow. There are two and a half million Mongolians all told, but the chances of their ever being united as one nation seem slim.

Much has been made in the West of the disputes and differences in dogma between the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic. These are basically concerned with the correct means to reach a joint end: the final world conquest by Communism. About this end, Russia and China still find themselves in complete agreement. There may be squabbles concerning de-Stalinisation, the establishment of the Chinese communes, and other phenomena of Communist effort and policy, but so long as the Communist parties of Russia and China remain ideologically united on their joint goal, the basic situation as far as the West is concerned stays the same, and menacing.

The one factor which might bring about a rupture between the two powers would be an unbearable increase in China's population, which is at present believed to total about 630,000,000 and to be increasing at about 15,000,000 a year. If famine and impossibly crowded conditions were ever to force China into a mass outburst from her present borders, the nearby vacuum to receive her surplus population stands glaringly obvious. Eastern Siberia—the Russians call it "Our Far East"—borders

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China to the north. It is thinly populated, and if the Chinese masses continue to grow in numbers as they have been doing, the temptation of that vast vacancy so near at hand may prove irresistible.

If ever population pressures force China into conflict with Russia, Mongolia would be in a highly unenviable position. Any idea of maintaining neutrality in such a clash would be absurd. Overnight Mongolia would find her role changed from that of 'buffer' to that of 'corridor', and some of the fiercest fighting could well take place on her soil.

It seems to me that diplomatic recognition by the Western powers of the M.P.R. must come soon. President Kennedy seemed in the mood to establish relations with Ulan Bator at the end of 1961, following Mongolia's entry into the U.N., but the alarm and anger displayed by Chiang Kai-shek in Formosa stayed his hand.

Chiang thinks that recognition by the U.S.A. of the M.P.R. would constitute a long stride along the road to American recognition of the Chinese People's Republic, and that is the one event which Chiang, in his remaining years, means to prevent.

But I think it will come, Chiang or no Chiang. And I think that Britain, which has had diplomatic relations with mainland China for over a decade, should lose no time in exchanging ambassadors with Mongolia. The Mongolians are all for it. The presence in Ulan Bator of Western embassies would set the seal on their ambition to obtain total acceptance by the world as a genuine nation, and not merely a piece of make-believe. They, or the 30,000 Communist (they say 'Socialist') party members who run the other million inhabitants of the M.P.R. know that, while their relations with Russia and China are important in the way of material help, they are still

almost completely cut off from the ideas, inventions, literature and life of the non-Communist world. They are mostly primitives who know nothing and understand nothing of what the West stands for. They dimly realise that Western contacts would benefit them, and would in the end enhance their standing. And for the same reason that they at present enjoy the game of playing off Russia against China, they would welcome the intersection of the Western element as a further factor in raising the bids for Mongolia's favour and perhaps trade.

For us and for the Americans, Mongolia would provide a richly rewarding listening and observation post. Ulan Bator is a small town still, in spite of the marble and stucco, and there would be endless opportunities to get a good idea of what is going on between Russia and China.

This is the ideal ground for observing Russia and China at grips; for providing Mongolia with the first genuine realisation of a Western presence that can be believed in and appreciated. And, because of the various Chinese commitments in Mongolia, it provides at least as good a listening-post in regard to what is going on in China itself as can be obtained in Hong Kong. (We have a legation in Peking and a consulate in Shanghai, but, devoted as may be the work of our representatives in those two cities, it is a hard task to obtain reliable information inside China.)

Hong Kong receives a host of refugees from China, but what they have to report about the conditions there must be suspect. They want to please. They are frightened, hungry people and their motives for coming to Hong Kong must fall into one of two classifications. Either they are the lucky ones, who have managed to get out, and will tell those who interrogate them what they expect and want to hear; or they are deliberately-



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planted Communist agents, who will of course say the same sort of thing, in exchange for being allowed to stay.

The Chinese in Mongolia are in a different category. There you have 50,000 or 60,000 young men in a work force, in touch with their families in China, who are by no means stooges. Five years in Mongolia is a long, dreary spell, and there must be some among them who would be willing to talk to Westerners if they got the chance.

Not long ago, just before I visited Mongolia, I talked to a British ambassador in a European country and mentioned the possibility of diplomatic exchanges with the M.P.R. He was so patently horrified that I wondered if he thought that he might be picked as our first man in Ulan Bator, if diplomats were to be exchanged. "Out of the question," he kept murmuring anxiously. I must admit that since seeing Mongolia for myself I have realised the extent of Mr. Khrushchev's impishness in sending the luckless Molotov there for two years as Russian Ambassador. I also realise that the first British Ambassador in Ulan Bator would have a great deal to put up with in the way of being spied on; that the social life there would be odd indeed; and his travels extremely uncomfortable. But I still think that it would be worth it.

Justice Douglas of the U.S. Supreme Court thinks that "the Mongolians are so far removed from Western culture, so distant from the influences of Judeo-Christian civilisation, so unaware of the West's great books and humane letters, that if they long remain in an isolated pocket between the Soviet Union and China, they may evolve into ideological puppets."\*

My own feeling is that the Mongolians in their isolated pocket are even now ideological puppets, and that the only way in which they can possibly be helped

\* *National Geographic Magazine* of Washington, D.C., March 1962 issue.

to become aware of those benefits which Justice Douglas lists is by a prompt and dynamic intrusion of Western representatives into their country, headed, in the case of Britain, not by an ambassador ruefully conscious of the unappealing local living conditions, but by a man who would accept the first British embassy in history there as a challenge.

#### POSTSCRIPT

Since I wrote the above, it has been officially announced (January 23rd, 1963) that Britain and the Mongolian People's Republic have decided to establish diplomatic relations.

I was, however, disappointed to find that, instead of setting up a full embassy in Ulan Bator, the arrangement is to be that the British Chargé d'Affaires in Peking, Mr. Terence Garvey, will merely visit the Mongolian capital from time to time, while continuing to live mainly in Peking.

This strikes me as an unsatisfactory compromise. With the best will in the world, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Peking cannot do a proper job if he is to attempt it on a visiting basis. A listening post—for that essentially is what Ulan Bator is diplomatically—must be constantly manned.

And I should have thought that the compliment to the Mongolians entailed in diplomatic recognition is considerably watered down by the part-time arrangement. It seems to imply tacit British agreement to the Chinese notion that Mongolia is still in some sense a dependency of Peking—a theory which the Mongolians repudiate.

If we are going to recognise the Mongolians, then we ought to do it in style, with a full-time ambassador, and no half-measures.

*“Three Cheers for Siberia”*

WEDNESDAY, August 29th. I rose with a song in my heart, for this was the final day. Low, rain-packed clouds were pouring off the tops of the mountains like smoke gushing from factory chimneys. Lenin's statue glistened under the drenching, and the plastic mackintoshes were everywhere out in force.

Batoch had got in the night before with the heavy luggage from the sanatorium. The little man looked very tired, with dark smudges beneath his eyes, and he indicated that the journey had been even worse than we had feared.

We embussed and trundled along the main street. I now felt that I knew it almost as well as streets where I had walked as a child; past the red and black marble tomb where lie the remains of Sukhe Bator, the hero of the Mongolian revolution, and his close friend and successor as head of the nation, Choibalsan; past the Theatre of Opera and Ballet, the Pedagogical Institute, the Circus and the Polyclinic, the Cinema and the Exhibition Hall. Once again I noted all the clocks on view in public places had stopped.

We were off to see some “industrial enterprises” and, if we only had known it, starting on the most unpleasant day of the whole visit.

The first visit was to a tannery, and I immediately received that sense of extraordinary rush and vigour which I have remarked on earlier. No one in sight was

even remotely loafing or taking a breather. I meant, but forgot in the uproar which immediately followed, to ask whether there was any equivalent of 'elevenses' or a 'tea-break' for the workers. I should very much doubt it. My impression was that any contemporary British trade unionist would be horrified at the tempo of the work, and the silence in which it is carried out. The women and girls, the men and youths, gave an impression of determination and total concentration; not more than one or two looked up as the strangers paused by their machines and then only to give the briefest of glances. The whole thing was like watching one of those grotesquely speeded-up films.

But once again trouble brewed. "Meester Markl," said Lotchin, "eet is forbidden to take photograph." "Oh, come now," I said, exasperated, "surely you have realised by now that I have no camera with me?" "Bot ees steel forbidden," he persisted. There were raised voices and expostulations from behind us. Turning, we found the photographers shaking their fists in rage at Horrible and his familiars, who had just told them that they could not take any photographs either.

The Leader was storming to and fro. Gernot Anderle's normally happy-go-lucky expression was twisted into a scowl of the greatest menace. Even the usually genial Tiffin, seated upon a handy pile of strong-smelling hides to await the outcome of the noisy argument, looked as though he would dearly have liked to do Lotchin a mischief.

The Leader reminded Lotchin that he had refused to allow the pictures of the *ger* encampment on the grounds that it made Mongolia look "backward", but now here was a modern factory, fitted with the finest of equipment and staffed by the most efficient-looking workers. What could be more welcome to the Mongolian authorities

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than such pictures? The quintessence of nonbackwardness, surely?

Lotchin was adamant, maintaining that the decision was not his but had been taken by the “vice-president of dees factory”. It was de Rule, and he could not question the validity of de Rule. It was almost certain that Lotchin could have allowed photographs inside factories if he had wanted to, for it is pretty sure that, so far as general authority went, he outranked any factory manager. But the typical muddleheadedness and stupidity of the man must have caused him to think that any factory, whatever its nature, must somehow be on the secret list where photographs were concerned. In fact I asked him whether he regarded a tannery as a military target, but received no reply.

The visit had accordingly lost all interest for the photographers, and since neither I nor Arthur Myrland had any desire to linger amid the smell, our stay was curtailed. The same thing happened at a nearby shoe factory, built and run by the Czechs and said to be a faithful reproduction of the Bata factory at Gottwaldov. An affable, if unshaven, young Czech overseer who spoke German told my German colleagues that he found the Mongolians very difficult to teach and not too good as workers, a surprising statement in view of their apparent industry, application and speed. A Viennese waltz was being piped in to encourage the women, most of whom wore some sort of head covering to keep their hair from catching in the machines. Apart from this simple precaution there were, so I was assured by the more knowledgeable of my colleagues, no safety measures visible, although I did not know what to look for in this technical field.

Behind the shoe factory there stood a crude wooden watch-tower in a corner of the outside wire fence, and

this Tiffin and the others photographed with gusto. Photography was permitted once the party was outside the various factories, so that Lotchin was unable to interfere; but he glowered at this piece of enterprise, and not surprisingly, for although the tower's purpose was unclear (to keep out nocturnal marauders or saboteurs, to keep in workers who might be tempted to go home early?) it bore an obvious and grim resemblance to the thousands of observation towers dotted along the frontiers of all Communist nations and was not at all the sort of thing which Lotchin wanted recorded.

The third and last of the factories which we saw was the one built by the Chinese a few years ago to Russian design and stocked almost entirely with British textile machinery. The Mongolian official handbook shows that in 1960 Mongolia bought 136,200 roubles' (£54,000) worth of machinery from Britain.

The interior of the textile factory, which is the only one in Mongolia, was again forbidden to the photographers, but as we entered I said loudly that I would be happy to arrange for photographs of all the machinery to be made available to any of my colleagues who might be interested as soon as we returned to the West, since it was certain that such photographs were in the possession of the firms which had supplied the machines. At this Lotchin started perceptibly and gazed at me aghast.

There had been no lack of police scrutiny at the first two factories, but for some reason the security precautions in the textile factory were even stronger, and the place fairly swarmed with furtive midgets in berets just like Horrible's. At one time I was being trailed by five (all to myself) and platoons of them were constantly bobbing up from behind a loom or peering round a row of spinning jennies as I went the rounds.

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Entering into the spirit of the thing, we took to darting off in splinter groups of two or three, or suddenly retracing our steps into a room from which the last of the police had just taken his departure. This led to great confusion, and for a time there was the patter of stealthily running feet up and down the aisles between the rows of machines, with every now and then an amusing confrontation as two of the running groups, berets and visitors, came unexpectedly face to face, or visitors found themselves hard on the heels of some of the berets whom, since the visitors had longer legs, they had succeeded in ‘lapping’.

My German and American colleagues played up splendidly and made me the man of the hour, since I was the only British reporter and thus presumably had a special interest in the place. Cries of “Allo, Mr. MacColl—dis way, plizz!” came from all quarters, as another reassuringly British firm’s name was discovered on the metal plates affixed to the machines. “Right!” I would call back, and break into a swift trot, my Mongolian outriders panting at my heels. I discovered refinements in the game. Since all cameras had been parked at the door, I, carrying as is my wont a large loose-leaf clipboard and pencil, instead of being regarded as the most innocent of the party by dint of not having a camera, became instead a marked man. Since there could be no photography I had clearly been assigned to make lightning sketches of the machinery.

Making sure that the MacColl Five had caught up with me, I would kneel on the floor and examine with painful care the name of the firm which had supplied the machine before me. On either side of me I caught the quiet plop of my attendant dwarfs sinking to their knees in their turn. From the rear we must have looked

like some macabre twentieth-century ritual of Man Worshipping the Machine.

Concealing with my free arm the paper on which I was writing, I would take all the time in the world to get down some such name as William Whitely & Sons, Huddersfield; Tomlinson's, Rochdale; Holt, Rochdale; Geo. Hattersley & Sons, Keighley; Prince Smith & Sons, Keighley; or S. Noton, Oldham. I would then—still jealously keeping my clipboard close to my chest—stand up again. My attendants would rise too. Then, with a flourish, I would hold out the clipboard, helpfully low down, so that they could make what they wanted of my notes. After a while they lost heart.

On leaving the factory, we passed the carpet-making department, where more women were hard at it, turning out what seemed to be a torrent of carpets. If there is one thing the Mongolians do not lack it is wool, and fortunately it is of exceptionally good quality. Moreover, the designs and colours seemed to show quite good taste, which is as well in view of the voracious demand for carpets in both house and *ger*.

The mood in the bus returning to the hotel was black. Attempting to brighten the atmosphere, Lotchin turned to Jimmy and said, "Well, and now, Mr. Macrah, how are your impression of Mongolia?"

Jimmy, unwilling to say anything which might threaten his desire to prove that everyone basically loves everyone else if only given the chance, said, "It has been an instructive and enjoyable visit. Your country is beautiful, your people friendly, your potentialities very great. Sometimes, as we drove across some stretch of countryside, I was not sure whether we were in Mongolia or in upper New York State, such was the close resemblance. But of course there was one great disappointment."



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Lotchin, who had been listening with some approval, asked: "Vot vas dat?"

Jimmy: "The obstacles which were put in my way in my attempt to phone New York."

Lotchin (looking as though camel's milk butter would not melt in his mouth): "Vot obstacles, Mr. Macrah?"

At this monstrously disingenuous query Jimmy's face assumed an expression of pained disbelief such as I have rarely witnessed on that of any human being. All his frustrations, all his thwarted longings to be the first man in history to telephone Manhattan from Ulan Bator, swam urgently to the surface. The memory of the hours spent pleading with Lotchin to be at least allowed to try to place the call, the elaborate explanations of its potential importance, the assurances that the feat was technically possible—the recollection of all these things fought poignantly for mastery on the stage afforded by his expressive countenance.

Finally, fixing Lotchin with a stricken stare, he contented himself with only two words: "Oh—*please!*"

But they were loaded with eloquent reproof.

When we regained the hotel it was still raining heavily, but I decided to walk to the main square, about five or six minutes away, and there buy a copy of the official handbook of statistics. I brushed past the blue-uniformed man at the hotel entrance and went on my way. The rain was torrential, Ulan Bator was not looking its best. I had to pick careful steps past the wide pools which gather quickly in a city which has no thought given to drainage of rainwater on either street or pavement. The people I met looked downcast, as do people anywhere when it is a wet day. And yet I felt happy.

Why, I asked myself, this light-heartedness? For the first time in two weeks I was by myself; I was walking, instead of being herded about in a jeep or bus, and what

was more, I was walking where I wanted to go, and not where Lotchin wanted me to go. The sensation was delightful.

At the shop on the main square I succeeded in buying the book I wanted, after a certain amount of good-humoured gesturing. Everyone in the shop, assistants and the other customers on the premises, was charming. Smiles were everywhere turned upon me. As I splashed my way back to the hotel for the last lunch, I reflected again on the wretched luck which had produced Lotchin as our link with Mongolia. If we could only have had a different guide, someone like the civilised man who accompanied Marvin Kalb on his three days of unsurveyed freedom while the rest of us were in the Mongolian equivalent of the 'outback', it is certain that our impressions would have left us far more indulgent. It is bad luck on Mongolia too that Lotchin is there to produce friction. The presence of the man is a guarantee that the visitor will be displeased and resentful. He acts as a goad rather than a guide.

During lunch there was, up to a point, good news for both Jimmy and The Professor. Against all expectations, it appeared that Ts Damdinsuren was coming to the hotel that afternoon. The head of the Mongolian Writers' Union would, proclaimed Lotchin, undoubtedly be present—but there was a slight difficulty. Since both The Professor and "Mr. Macrah" had asked to see him, and since his time was limited, Ts Damdinsuren craved their indulgence to the extent of allowing him to meet them simultaneously.

The prospect of thus sharing the prestidigicious catch was not calculated to appeal either to Jimmy or to The Professor. Their motives for seeing him were uproariously different. Moreover, there were whispers that the note sent belatedly to the hotel by Damdinsuren was

intended to indicate a meeting with only one of the visitors, but it was uncertain which. Each suspected that the other was gate-crashing on his carefully-contrived engagement. And, to fill The Professor's cup to overflowing, if Jimmy sat in on the meeting, he—The Professor—would be called on to translate the proceedings, which were conducted in Russian.

But in the end it was held as a tripartite meeting. The Professor remarked later that matters had been gravely delayed by Jimmy's thirst for note-taking. "Mr. Damdinsuren and I would be starting to discuss a famous Mongolian poet of the early nineteenth century," reported The Professor, "when Jimmy would interrupt us to ask how his name was spelled and what his home town was. Rather galling Damdinsuren and I found it."

The Damdinsuren interview also produced for Jimmy the nadir, the appalling nadir, of the whole trip. Seeking to put the Mongolian scholar at his ease, Jimmy pulled out his cherished Charles Dickens pickle spoon. With a grateful smile Damdinsuren took it, thanked Jimmy warmly for the nice thought, and stowed it away in an inside pocket. Jimmy looked to be on the verge of tears. It took The Professor ten or more minutes to explain, as tactfully as possible, that the pickle spoon had not been intended as a gift. Damdinsuren returned it with excellent grace, but The Professor was later waspish about the additional waste of time entailed over the vexatious contretemps.

The climactic storm burst in the afternoon. The Leader had been summoned to a conference with Lotchin and Sharhu. Suddenly he reappeared, white with rage and indignation. He had been told, once for all, that all films must be handed over to the Mongolians for developing and that in consequence the party must leave the next day without them.

Although neither Myrland, nor I, nor The Professor was involved in this fantasy, we completely shared the indignation of our colleagues and were determined on solidarity.

Our meeting continued for a long time. Every sort of suggestion was canvassed, including direct appeals to Tsedenbal and the Foreign Minister. Reinbacher gave us a dramatic description of his conference with Lotchin and Sharhu, their delivery of the sinister ultimatum and his abrupt withdrawal from Sharhu's office when, to quote him, "I am tapping ze table with firmness and I am ronning away. I vos med—real med—und I showed it!"

Kalb was inclined to think that Reinbacher's action in having stormed out of the room was tactically sound, and that before long The Leader would receive an invitation to renew the talks. The Moscow hand was right. Our protest meeting was still going full blast, in the suite which Charles and I shared, when Gold Tooth—whose secondary role was that of Ulan Bator's Mercury—presented himself and informed Reinbacher that he would be welcome for a return visit down below.

The Leader faced his finest hour. He rose with dignified deliberation, stood for a moment to attention, then turned and paced towards the door, our murmured valedictions in his ears. Gold Tooth, in his declaration, had conveyed the astonishing news that this time The Leader would encounter the President of the Mongolian Tourist Organisation, an unlooked-for turn of events.

Occasionally, in the course of the fortnight we had spent in the M.P.R., we had speculated about the invisible tourist President. Since practically every boss we met during the visit—bosses of farms, lamaseries, factories, hospitals—invariably seemed to be a vice-

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president, it seemed as if the office of president was regarded as a largely meaningless sinecure, as at Oxford University, and it was the vice-president who always did the work and took the responsibility.

An alternative suggestion had been that we were regarded as insufficiently important for the President to waste his time on and that Vice-President Sharhu was thought to be of amply sufficient rank to deal with the likes of us.

The President turned out to be a woman. Reinbacher described her as fiftyish, nondescript, and so unsure of herself that she said little or nothing spontaneously, but read to *The Leader* from voluminous prepared notes. What it boiled down to was that, in an unexampled gesture of friendliness and in order to show how greatly they desired to meet the wishes of the visitors, they were now prepared to drop the request to have the colour films for developing, since that might indeed present difficulties and delays, and would insist only on the black and white film.

Back with the latest offer came Reinbacher to our suite, where the rest of us were sitting, taking a moody gulp of vodka now and again, trying to estimate what were the chances of getting the films out intact.

A good deal of money, probably several thousands of pounds, was at stake. It was a most serious situation, professionally speaking, for the photographers and the two television network teams. If they returned to Bonn, Cologne, London, and New York empty-handed, all the explanations in the world about their unreasonable treatment at the hands of the Mongolian authorities would not suffice to avoid their all getting black marks. I knew enough about human nature and the reactions of even the most enlightened and sympathetic of employers to realise that there might be lasting disapproval

at high levels, and that some of the men whose task it is to keep an eye on office expenditure might harbour resentment against individuals, however blameless, as a result of the impending fiasco. No newspaper wants its reporters to get killed or wounded or imprisoned—not on sentimental grounds alone, but because it is also inefficient and costly. No photographic agency or television network relishes the notion of a highly expensive expedition producing nothing, and people sitting in offices thousands of miles from Ulan Bator, and who were almost certainly incapable of imagining the atmosphere or attitudes there, would be inclined to think that confiscation of the films was the result of some avoidable piece of ham-handedness on the part of their men on the spot.

In the early days of the visit Lotchin had taken the precaution of obtaining from all those with cameras a detailed listing of the cameras—their makes, types and so on—and auxiliary apparatus and numbers and rolls of film. Thus, the suggestion, which someone put forward, that an attempt be made to take a certain number of films out without declaring them was quickly discarded as not worth the risk.

As Reinbacher reported the most recent development it soon became apparent that the Mongolians had succeeded to some extent in splitting the previous solidarity of the party. Reinbacher himself was in favour of compromise. If, he contended, everyone were to hand over a few black and white films, the Mongolians' collective face would be saved and no great harm would be done. But an anti-appeasement group was forcefully led by Gernot Anderle.

"Nein, nein!" he cried. "I know zese people by now. If zey sink zey can force us to gif som film, zen zey vill spoil all else film on purpose, isn't it?"

"Nein, nein," roared The Leader in his turn. "Ve

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most display som elastic! If zese people can tell ze police zat zey haf been giffen som film by us, zen zey are heppy, ze police are heppy und dey do not furzer insist.”

“Bot,” rejoined Anderle, “you talk of ze police. Zese people *are* ze police!”

“May I?” put in The Professor. For once he went disregarded. Anderle refused to alter his position. He said it was for him a matter of principle. The Leader looked close to despair. A babble of many voices rose in argument and quarrel. At the height of the discussion the door opened and a Mongolian unknown to most of us entered the room, a questing expression on his dark brown face.

“What the hell do *you* want?” snapped someone.

“Ah, go easy on him, fellas,” intoned Myrland, to the general astonishment, “this young fella is a crackerjack. He accompanied Jimmy and me over to the Soviet Embassy this afternoon, when we went to get our special visas, and he was thoroughly helpful.”

Momentarily mollified by the unexpected plea, everybody looked guardedly at the newcomer who said something in Russian. The Professor pricked up his ears. “The man,” he relayed to us, “is looking for a shirt which would appear to have gone astray in the laundry. Does anyone find himself with an unexplained extra shirt?” We all shook our heads. The Mongolian bowed courteously and withdrew.

Hardly had he done so, when the door re-opened and into the room walked, side by side, two of the most remarkable apparitions that even a fortnight in the M.P.R. had so far produced. Even by Mongolian standards they were small, and in Britain might well have been taken for a couple of schoolboy twins, their growth tragically stunted by unknown causes, who were

wearing their first pair of long trousers. The adjective is strictly relative, since the garments which hung about their truncated legs looked like soccer shorts, and tended to blow about as they advanced.

Their jackets, on the other hand, really *were* long. It was as though their tailor, whoever he might be, having taken a certain amount of trouble to provide them with trousers which did not actually trail and trip them as they walked, had given up in despair when it came to the rest of the transaction, and had simply handed them both full-scale jackets off the peg.

These were cylindrical, frame-hugging numbers etched in a sort of demented imitation of Scotch tweed, and finishing only an inch or so above the tiny knees of the two wearers. Both wore identical enamel lapel badges showing the Russian astronaut Gagarin. The general effect was as if the late Toulouse-Lautrec had elected to have himself photographed wearing a secondhand zoot suit and standing facing a looking-glass.

Since the previous caller had proved innocuous, we were at first disposed to treat the miniature newcomers in friendly fashion. The period of good-will was, alas, short-lived.

The Professor, after having queried the two in Russian, turned portentously to the photographers. "These," he announced, "have come to take your films away to be developed."

At this the general emotion swelled to hitherto unimaginable heights. It was like some frightful storm scene, where the battered ship seems to be proving herself as just capable of weathering the elements, when suddenly there looms up a wave greater and more hideous than any so far encountered which, it seems clear, must now engulf all hands.

The photographers gazed at the pygmy interlopers



with undisguised loathing while lamentations burgeoned on every side. Had they really laboured for two long weeks, taken their thousands of pictures, braved blizzard and desert, lived on unsuitable food, endured the harassment of Lotchin, had their stomachs upset, and undergone that series of pitiless journeys, only at the end to have to deliver their films into the hands of this unspeakably irrelevant duo? It must be admitted that I fully sympathised with my mourning colleagues. If somebody had offered me a sizeable sum—say 50,000 tughriks—to guess correctly what the tiny twosome did for a living, I believe that I should never have hit upon darkroom men as the answer.

If there were vaudeville in Mongolia, I suppose the likeliest supposition might have been an underprivileged song-and-dance team, executing a dainty lockstep to a teasing accompaniment on the glockenspiel. But after that I think I would have given up.

The two stood close together in the middle of the room, staring about them in dismay. The language barrier was instantly overthrown by the anger and hostility which stalked among us, and the little ones, sensitive, so it seemed, to atmosphere, quickly realised that their mission was a failure. John Tiffin, intently surveying the stunted envoys with an artist's regard, said later that their eyes, which even to begin with had peeped with caution from lozenge-shaped sockets of unusual depth, shrank, as their owners listened with growing terror to the menacing din, further and further inwards, reminding Tiffin of timid crustaceans seeking the sanctuary of their shells as potential aggression makes itself apparent. After five minutes the two wordlessly turned and went.

The discussion started to lose its impetus. All points of view had been advanced, many of them more than

once. The Leader was asked to return to the newly-unveiled female president of the Tourist Organisation to see if, after this further lapse of time, a further version of second thoughts might not be on offer. The meeting broke up. Charles went to his room and I to mine, there to try to collect my thoughts.

After a while, Charles knocked and came in. "I've got wonderful news for you, René," he said, deadpan. "We have been ordered to leave at once for the airfield, where the Customs people are waiting for us."

Accepting this as one of Charles's jests, I at first brushed it aside, after laughing in tribute to a splendid flight of imagination. But he was in earnest. We went downstairs and once again climbed into the bus, that bus which had come to symbolise our captivity.

As we drove out to the airport, thus covering yet another unnecessary twenty miles there and back, I looked eagerly round for Lotchin. Something had snapped. That, on top of everything else, we should be asked to go out to the airport for the Customs inquisition on the night before we were leaving the country induced in me a temper as real as that which I produce on occasion at hotels, when the matter of 'doubling up' is raised, is false.

Where was Lotchin? For once he was not with us. Then where was Horrible? Strangely, he was not with us either. I looked about the bus. The only Mongolian, apart from the driver, who was present was a wizened man who had been with us from the start of the tour, and who had flitted about taking photographs of us as we chatted with lama, co-operative farmer or sanatorium director. I decided that he would do in the absence of the others. I turned and directed my spleen on him. I do not know how much English he understood, but he got the drift. It is a matter of record that he was not seen again.

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At the airport we were ushered upstairs to the terminal building's V.I.P. room. There was a pause while we sat about amid the plush and lace, in glowering silence. Then we went downstairs again, having filled in the inevitable forms, for the ordeal at the hands of the Customs authorities. Lotchin materialised, to explain that “eet ees de law of de M.P.R. that non-developed feelms cannot be taken from our countree in circumstances of anything”. Abruptly becoming aware that he was facing what amounted to a lynching party, he backed away and vanished past a handy potted tree.

We were sitting in overstuffed chairs with huge soft arms, awaiting the last challenge. To one side there was a narrow door which, we knew, led into the Customs room. Gernot Anderle, still in impressive form, was suggesting that if the Mongolians tried to impound any film they should be charged the equivalent of £100 per roll for the privilege. This struck me as an ingenious notion, but since I was not directly involved all I could do was give him an encouraging look. I was by now as thoroughly aroused as if I too had precious films which I wanted to take with me.

The door to the Customs room opened. A *del*-clad female stood on the threshold. She peered round, saw Marvin Kalb, and with a Mata Hari-like smile, beckoned to him. Marvin rose impressively and, followed by John Tiffin, walked into the Customs room. The door was closed behind them.

An hour then went by. Occasionally raised voices could be heard from beyond the door, although in what language they were making their points I could not determine. Rumours swept the group, and Anderle gamely suggested increasing the fee for each roll of film retained by the Mongolians to £200.

Harry Hamm said to me, “I thought that Albania was

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the most horrible Communist country that I have ever been into, but I was quite wrong."

At last the door opened again and Kalb stalked out. Accompanied by The Leader, and by various officials, he went upstairs, back to the V.I.P. room for another conference.

Having by this time learned something of the technique from Kalb himself, we took this to be a good sign. We were right. Later John Tiffin gave me an eye-witness account of the victory achieved by Kalb over the Mongolians, who had been intent, until the last moment, on seizing all the films.

Kalb was told again that the law of the M.P.R. demanded that all film taken inside Mongolia must be developed and examined by the authorities before it could be allowed to leave the country and he must thus surrender all the film taken by Tiffin in the past two weeks.

This demand was countered in uncompromising style by Kalb, who pointed out to the Customs officials that the films were his company's property. He was in no circumstances prepared to surrender them to anyone else.

"We insist!" raged the Customs men, while Lotchin hovered in the background. "We are not leaving without our property," replied Kalb coolly. "We are prepared to stay on for two weeks or two months, if necessary."

The officials wavered. Then Kalb played his master card. He asked for his bags and those of Tiffin back. "Why?" quavered the officials. "Because," declaimed Kalb, "we are returning to the hotel in Ulan Bator."

That did it. There followed the invitation to go upstairs with The Leader and the officials for a final face-saving conference. The victory had been won. The

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threat to throw us all out three days earlier had been neatly trumped by the threat to stay on indefinitely.

It was a moment to savour. The Leader came running downstairs, encountered Jimmy and flung his arms round him. “Ah, Shimmy,” he cried in ecstasy, “ve are all laughing of you, bot ve loff you all!”

The next morning Tiffin brought a last bulletin about Jimmy. Having awoken early in the room he shared with the indomitable publisher, Tiffin had walked over to Jimmy’s bed and gently shaken him. “Time to get up, Mr. Macrae,” he said.

Jimmy looked up at him through half-closed eyes. “Thank you very much,” he replied. “Goodnight.”

After the last breakfast there was anti-climax when it was reported that there was fog at Irkutsk and that in consequence our flight would be delayed two hours. Batoch had been offered money by some members of the party but had refused with dignity. I accordingly took a leaf out of Jimmy’s book and, finding Batoch alone in the deserted V.I.P. dining-room, gave him one of the three ball-points which I carry (I can never remember about re-fills). He seemed pleased and I wrung his hand and wished him well. The little smiling waitress with the pig-tail came in, and I was just slipping her the second of my three ball-points when Batoch came back. I could see from his expression that a blunder had been committed, and that I should not have been caught giving his assistant the same present as he himself had received. On the spur of the moment I plunged my hand into my pocket, found there the pen-knife which I keep, fished it out and offered it to Batoch. I think that put the situation, as between Batoch and the little waitress, back on the correct level.

When the news came that Irkutsk was fog-free, we debouched on to the steps of the hotel. Before us, lining

up to get into a bus of their own just like ours, was a group of stoutish, depressed-looking Europeans. They were hindered by instruments which they clutched, trombones, trumpets, saxophones, double basses, a drum of colossal size, a harp, a xylophone. Some extra sense told the Germans in our party that they were fellow-countrymen, but from the Eastern sector.

"Just arriving?" called The Leader cheerfully.

Glumly, they nodded assent.

"Ah, we are just leaving. You will find the food perfectly delicious. On no account neglect the *koumiss*."

Silently they hauled their impedimenta aboard the bus and were driven away.

On the last bus trip out to the airport someone suggested that it might be suitable to offer a joint tip to Lotchin, but it was generally felt that even in his case the gesture might be deemed to smack of brutality.

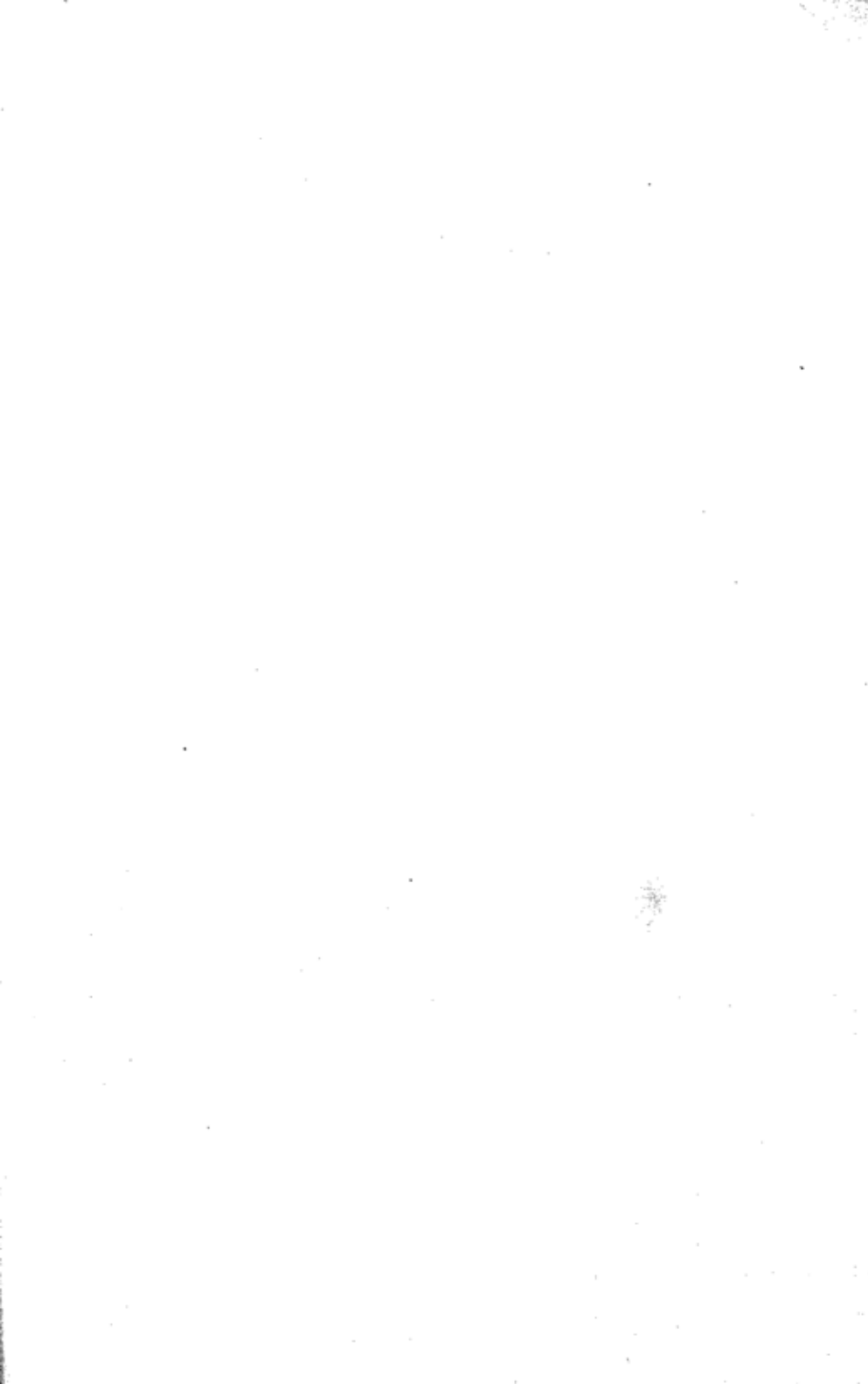
At the airport the Customs had a final brief fling when they mulcted the photographers and TV men a shared total of £350 for overweight fines; but this was paid without demur in view of the resounding victory of the night before.

Pausing only to observe that the out-size helicopter was still where it had been all those weeks—or was it only two?—earlier, we made our way into the aircraft and took our seats.

As the propellers started to turn Lotchin came aboard. "Heppy journey—heppy journey!" he piped. I think that nobody spoke.

As the aircraft's wheels left the tarmac, with Irkutsk only an hour and a half distant, I turned and cried: "Three cheers for Siberia, chaps!"

To the marked surprise of a Pole sitting next me, there came a resounding response.



# Outer Mongolia

